



# “You Can Kill Us with Dialogue:” Critical Perspectives on Wind Energy Development in a Nordic-Saami Green Colonial Context

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Accepted: 19 January 2023 / Published online: 11 March 2023  
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## Abstract

This article explores Southern Saami reindeer herders’ experiences and contestations over state consultation and corporate dialogue during a conflict over the Øyfjellet wind energy project in Norway. Informed by a committed research approach and *juxtaposition* with findings from Indigenous peoples’ territorial struggles in Latin-America, the article provides critical perspectives on governance practices in a Nordic-Saami green colonial context. The research draws on ethnography from a consultation meeting between Jillen Njaarke, the impacted reindeer herding community, and state authorities, as well as diverse written material. The study suggests that the state- and corporate-led “dialogues” *displaced* the root cause of the conflict, revealed epistemic *miscommunication*, and perpetuated relations of *domination* which limited *emancipatory* effects for Jillen Njaarke. The premises and discourses underpinning the “dialogues” further reproduced racist notions which devalue ancestral Saami reindeer herding knowledges, practices, and landscape relations. These findings challenge dialogue as prescription of good governance and conflict resolution in a context where democracy and compliance with Indigenous peoples’ rights are perceived as high.

**Keywords** Green colonialism · Jillen Njaarke Sijte · Øyfjellet · Southern Saami reindeer herding · Consultation · Dialogue

## Introduction

You can kill us with dialogue (...) It is difficult for me to sit here and listen to people talk about a moral responsibility to save the world, because who should pay the price? (Tømmerbakke, 2019).

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In a panel discussion about the production of wind energy and electric car batteries at the business conference *High North Dialogues* held in Bådådjo,<sup>1</sup> Norway in 2019, the president of the Saami Parliament,<sup>2</sup> Aili Keskitalo, critiqued the dialogue that underwrites Norway's green transition agenda.<sup>3</sup> Keskitalo's critique has been echoed by Saami authorities, organizations and right-holders who argue that non-consensual encroachments by so-called "green" industries on Saami reindeer herding lands is a form of "green colonialism" (e.g., Brandvold, 2021; SaamiCouncil, 2017; Sametingsrådet, 2019). Saami and other Indigenous peoples' land-use practices leave small ecological and climate footprints but are among the most exposed to climate change. Still, the Nordic states' commitment to the international climate change agenda legitimates industries that perpetuate colonial discourses and a continued dispossession of ancestral Saami reindeer herding lands and practices (E. M. Fjellheim, *forthcoming*; Kuokkanen, 2022; Lawrence, 2014; Normann, 2020).

Conflicts between wind energy development and Indigenous peoples' rights are not unique to Saepmie<sup>4</sup> (e.g., Avila, 2018; Dunlap, 2019). Norway presents an interesting case, as the escalating conflicts over wind energy development on Saami reindeer herding lands belie citizens' high level of trust in democratic and legal processes in the country (Kleven, 2016). Norway was the first, and only country in the Nordic-Saami context,<sup>5</sup> to ratify the International Labor Organization Convention No. 169 on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO 169),<sup>6</sup> and the government aspires "to be at the forefront of Indigenous peoples' rights".<sup>7</sup> With few exceptions (Broderstad, 2022), however, the application of these rights in wind energy licensing processes has proven to be extremely difficult (Olsen, 2019).

In accordance with ILO 169, the Saami people's right to consultation and participation in decision-making regarding matters which concern them is considered to be a crucial mechanism to safeguard broader Indigenous rights. In 2005, the Saami Parliament and Norwegian authorities signed a consultation agreement,<sup>8</sup> which was recently converted into law through an amendment to the Saami Act. While the scope of the agreement was formerly limited to government officials, the new amendment extends the responsibility to consult the Saami Parliament and Saami interests and rights-holders to municipal authorities (Prop. 86 L, 2020). The

<sup>1</sup> The southern Saami name of Bodø in Norwegian language.

<sup>2</sup> The Norwegian Saami Parliament is the directly elected political representative body of the Saami in Norway, established through the Saami Act in 1987 and opened in 1990.

<sup>3</sup> "Det grønne skiftet" (08.12.2021): <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/klima-og-miljo/innsiktsartikler-klima-miljo/det-gronne-skiftet/id2879075/>

<sup>4</sup> *Saepmie*, equivalent to *Sápmi* in northern Saami, is the Southern Saami term for the Saami ancestral homelands across the colonial border of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.

<sup>5</sup> Sweden and Finland have not ratified ILO 169.

<sup>6</sup> "Ratifications of C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989" (No.169): [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312314](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314).

<sup>7</sup> Hurdalsplattformen. For en regjering utgått fra Arbeiderpartiet og Senterpartiet 2021-2025 (14. Oct., 2021): <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/cb0adb6c6fee428caa81bd5b339501b0/no/pdfs/hurdalsplattformen.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> "Prosedyrer for konsultasjoner mellom statlige myndigheter og Sametinget" (11. May 2005): <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/urfolk-og-minoriteter/samepolitikk/midtspalte/prosedyrer-for-konsultasjoner-mellom-sta/id450743/>

amendment recognizes “good faith” consultations with the objective of reaching an agreement, but denies the Saami demand to include Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as established in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)—an omission which is inconsistent with recent developments in Indigenous law (Ravna, 2020). In effect, the Norwegian state has a legally binding responsibility to safeguard Saami rights, while companies are merely expected to engage in dialogue in accordance with international principles and guidelines for responsible stakeholder engagement and human rights.<sup>9</sup>

Although legal requirements and guidelines have been in place for almost two decades, research on their implications for Saami reindeer herding rights is understudied. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has called for more effective consultations to implement “the right of the Saami people to self-determination and to more genuinely influence decision-making” (UN, 2016), and the Norwegian National Institution for Human Rights has admitted a lack of systematic knowledge of how consultations are carried out (NIM, 2022). Previous studies show that Saami rights to land and water are the most controversial issues consulted over, and that the Saami Parliament is least likely to consent on policy regarding wind energy development and power lines (Broderstad, 2022; Broderstad, Hernes, & Jenssen, 2015). A few studies from both Sweden and Norway address how Saami reindeer herding communities engage with both state and corporate actors in decision-making over resource extraction (e.g., Johnsen, 2016; Kårtveit, 2021; Larsen & Raitio, 2019; Normann, 2021). However, there is a need for more research on how state consultation and corporate dialogue intertwine, as well as for ethnographic accounts of how these processes are carried out with Saami reindeer herding communities whose lands are directly impacted.

In this article, I address this knowledge opportunity through the study of a conflict over the Øyfjellet wind energy project in Vaapste<sup>10</sup> municipality. Øyfjellet is one of Norway’s largest onshore wind energy projects and illustrates well Keski-talo’s critique of how dialogue is used to legitimate green colonialism in Saepmie. The aim of this article is to provide critical perspectives on the practices, premises, and discourses of “dialogues”<sup>11</sup> that are prescribed as good governance and conflict resolution in Norway. Informed by a committed decolonial approach, I focus on how Jillen Njaarke Sijte,<sup>12</sup> the impacted reindeer herding community, experienced and contested consultations with Norwegian license authorities and corporate dialogue with wind energy developer Eolus Vind.

The main part of the analysis is based on “ethnographic fragments” (Tsing, 2011) from a consultation meeting between Jillen Njaarke and the Norwegian

<sup>9</sup> “Business and Human Rights. National Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles” (Accessed 13. Jun., 2022): [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/mr/business\\_hr\\_b.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/mr/business_hr_b.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The southern Saami name of Vefsn in Norwegian language.

<sup>11</sup> When I use “dialogues” in plural, I refer to both state consultation and corporate dialogue.

<sup>12</sup> Sijte is the southern Saami term for a community of families, often related, who collectively organize and practice reindeer herding within a designated area.

Water Resource and Energy Directorate (NVE) in the town Mussere<sup>13</sup> in 2019. This approach goes beyond previous studies of meeting protocols and final outcomes of consultation procedures (e.g., Broderstad & Hernes, 2008; Broderstad et al., 2015) by enabling direct observation of a space characterized by power struggles. I further analyze the implications of the consultation and the corporate dialogue with Eolus Vind through a diverse range of written material. As such critical perspectives are limited in Saepmie, I propose to draw lessons from the more extensive literature from Latin America, a region where Indigenous peoples' contestations over "dialogues" as premise for the Indigenous rights regime in territorial struggles are extensive. I do not aim to generalize nor compare what are substantially different political and socio-economic contexts. I am rather inspired by Juliet Hooker's (2017) methodology of *juxtaposition* that allows to learn from contexts which are related yet distinct.

The article is structured as follows: I begin presenting the methodological and analytical approach, before briefly introducing some background to the Øyfjellet project and the actors involved. Based on the analysis which follows, I argue that the study exemplifies and expands on four mechanisms and effects of state consultations and corporate dialogue found in empirical and legal studies from Latin America (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). Despite contextual variation, the study illustrates that the "dialogues" (1) *displaced* the root cause of the conflict with procedural norms and compensation, (2) revealed epistemic *miscommunication* in impact assessments, (3) perpetuated colonial state and corporate *domination* which (4) afforded limited *emancipatory* effects for Jillen Njaarke. Informed by Grégoire's (2019) study of the Canadian mining industry in Guatemala, I further question the political and normative underpinnings of the "dialogues" Jillen Njaarke engaged in, and suggest that they reproduce racist notions which devalue ancestral Saami reindeer herding knowledge, practices, and landscape relations.

## Methodological and Analytical Framework

Informed by a decolonial approach to research (e.g., Kuokkanen, 2000; Smith, 2012), my methodology is committed to identify and challenge colonial power asymmetries and contribute to self-determination and emancipation for Indigenous peoples in academia and beyond. Saami reindeer herding communities that face multiple encroachments on their lands are vulnerable to research and participation fatigue (E. M. Fjellheim, [forthcoming](#); Löf & Stinnerbom, 2016). As an ethical response to this fatigue, I did few interviews and instead used a consultation meeting as the main research site. One of the reindeer herders from Jillen Njaarke,<sup>14</sup> however, expressed strong interest to share his knowledge and reflections of the process, which resulted in several research conversations between 2018-2022. In addition, I analyzed a diverse range of written materials, including letters of communication between the lawyers of Jillen Njaarke, Eolus Vind, and the license

<sup>13</sup> The Southern Saami name for Mosjøen in Norwegian language.

<sup>14</sup> Ole-Henrik Kappfjell.

authorities, reports, and news articles. I also accompanied political gatherings and legal processes, and engaged on social arenas where the research topic was discussed. The research process was furthermore committed beyond academic endeavors, as I published opinions based on preliminary research results (e.g., Ellingsen, Fjellheim, & Normann, 2022; E. M. Fjellheim, Carl, & Normann, 2020), shared extensive notes from meetings and a court hearing, and reached out to media and provided interpretation service for Jil-len Njaarke when requested (Reid-Collins, 2020).

Literature and experiences from Latin America offer a novel critical lens to study Indigenous peoples' rights and governance processes in a Nordic-Saami green colonial context. Latin America is the region in the world where most countries have ratified ILO 169<sup>15</sup> and adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and where jurisprudence on consultation and FPIC is prominent (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011; Sieder, Schjolden, & Angell, 2016). Indigenous peoples have been central players in territorial struggles and have influenced decolonial thinking (Rodríguez & Inturias, 2018). Not least, ethnographic and critical studies on the implications of consultation and corporate dialogue for Indigenous peoples' rights are extensive (Barkin & Lemus, 2016; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011; Wright & Tomaselli, 2019). Simultaneously, Norway differs substantially from most Latin American countries in social, political, and economic terms. Norwegian legal and bureaucratic institutions are considered strong, and the country scores high on health, education, and standards of living.<sup>16</sup> Recognizing that these differences influence the conditions for Indigenous peoples' political and legal participation, I do not aim to compare, but rather juxtapose findings from the Øyfellet study with literature from Latin America. Hooker (2017) suggests that *juxtaposition* offers a way to avoid comparison and its prior assumptions of similarities and differences. She writes: "it is by being viewed simultaneously that the viewer's understanding of each object is transformed" (2017, p. 13). Allowing ideas to travel, I further build on my decade-long exchange and solidarity work with Indigenous peoples' territorial struggles in Latin-America (E. M. Fjellheim, 2013, 2018).

My analysis is mainly structured around the four mechanisms and effects of Indigenous peoples' right to consultation identified by Rodríguez-Garavito (2011) in a study of cases from Colombia, Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, and Nicaragua, but is complemented by a broader set of literature from the region. The first concerns how procedural norms and compensation *displace* the root cause of the conflict (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). Consultations led by states or corporations are depoliticized spaces designed to defuse tension without resolving crucial elements, such as environmental impacts and human rights violations (Dunlap, 2018; Grégoire, 2019; E Leifsen, Gustafsson, Guzmán-Gallegos, & Schilling-Vacaflo, 2017a; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). Interpretations of legal principles differ widely on a spectrum between consultation and consent (Gustafsson, 2018; E Leifsen et al., 2017b; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). Rodríguez-Garavito (2011) argues that dominant

<sup>15</sup> 15 out of 24 countries.

<sup>16</sup> "Human Development Index (HDI) by Country 2022": <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/hdi-by-country>

consultation practices are characterized by a “business-friendly” interpretation which is limited to procedure; meanwhile, Indigenous peoples call for self-determination and a right to give or withhold consent. Through the Øyfjellet case, I study how Jillen Njaarke’s human rights claims and the state license authorities’ accountability to comply with them are displaced by corporate dialogue and mitigation measures, which compromise ancestral Saami reindeer herding knowledge, practices, and landscape relations.

*Miscommunication* emerges when “different kinds of knowledge, based on radically distinct epistemological roots, get crossed” (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011, p. 295). Decolonial scholarship from Latin America has developed alongside environmental struggles (Rodríguez & Inturias, 2018), e.g., by critiquing how colonial knowledge regimes destroy diverse epistemologies and lifeworlds through *epistemicide* (de Sousa Santos, 2015). Knowledge controversies in impact assessments are common, as Indigenous peoples contest the epistemic foundations of these decision-making processes (Aguilar-Støen & Hirsch, 2017; E Leifsen, Sánchez-Vázquez, & Reyes, 2017b; Schilling-Vacaflor, 2019). In Saepmie, epistemic injustice has been explored in natural resource management (Johnsen, Mathiesen, & Eira, 2017; S Joks & Law, 2017; Law & Joks, 2019), license permitting (Lawrence & Larsen, 2017; Raitio, 2020), and litigation processes (E. M. Fjellheim, *forthcoming*), but in this article it is analyzed in relation to a broader set of dynamics found in consultation and corporate dialogue processes. Miscommunication, however, must not be reduced to mere lack of understanding between “Indigenous” and “Western” knowledge systems. Beyond epistemic difference, any knowledge which challenges corporate science (Kirsch, 2014) and interests might be strategically ignored (McGoey, 2012; Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008), as found in a similar conflict over wind energy development on reindeer herding lands in Fosen (E. M. Fjellheim, *forthcoming*).

*Domination* (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011) refers to power asymmetries between state, companies, and Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples in Latin America contest a top-down and neoliberal implementation of consultation which constrains alternative development paths, such as the philosophy of *Buen Vivir* which can be translated into *good living* (Villalba, 2013). Although the state is accountable for consultations to take place, companies tend to disrespect them in practice, often committing acts of violence, cooptation, and coercion (Dunlap, 2018; Grégoire, 2019; E Leifsen et al., 2017a; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). In this article, I analyze power asymmetries in a Nordic-Saami colonial context which is characterized by subtle and bureaucratic mechanisms and expressions of violence (Kuokkanen, 2020; Reinert, 2019; Sehlin MacNeil, 2017), e.g. through nonconsensual disposessions of Saami reindeer herding lands legitimated by paternalistic and moral discourses of climate change mitigation (E. M. Fjellheim, *forthcoming*; Kuokkanen, 2022; Lawrence, 2014; Normann, 2020).

Possible *emancipatory* effects (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011) may explain why Indigenous peoples continue to engage in constrained spaces for decision-making. While some consider them to be “bureaucratic traps” (Dunlap, 2018), others argue that Indigenous peoples’ agency needs to be understood as complex, ambiguous, and strategic (E Leifsen et al., 2017a). This implies balancing “a fine line between confronting companies directly and claiming, for instance, monetary compensation” (Normann, 2021, p. 13) or

making a decision between "life or death" (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011, p. 302) if irreversible environmental or cultural harm can be avoided or postponed (E Leifsen et al., 2017b; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). These processes may also stimulate collective mobilization, strengthen identity formation, promote knowledge of rights, and increase leverage for future negotiations (Aguilar-Støen & Hirsch, 2015; E Leifsen et al., 2017b; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). In this article, I study how Jillen Njaarke's contestations over the structures, content, and decisions of the "dialogues" they engaged in, afforded limited but some strategic benefits and sense of emancipation.

While the studies above focus on practice, less attention has been given to the political and normative implications of "dialogues" in resource conflicts on Indigenous peoples' lands. Often, state consultations and corporate dialogues are portrayed as the only legitimate solution, while resistance to, or critique of these processes is stigmatized and criminalized (Dunlap, 2018; Grégoire, 2019). Through research in Guatemala, Grégoire (2019, p. 696) explores how "dialogue" is performed and legitimated by the elite's racist discourse toward Indigenous peoples, calling for more research on how "ontological underpinnings of CSR<sup>17</sup> interact with local political regimes elsewhere". Responding to this call, I add a critical analysis of the premises and discourses underpinning the strong notion of dialogue as prescription of good governance and conflict resolution in Norway.

## Jillen Njaarke Sijte and the Øyfjellet Project

The Øyfjellet wind energy project is located in the middle of an important reindeer migration route and pasture area of Jillen Njaarke, a southern Saami community that has practiced nomadic reindeer herding since the 1600s (Severinsen, 2022; Vorren, 1986). Due to the colonial politics of the Nordic states, the Saami have been dispossessed of ancestral lands, exposed to religious persecution and assimilation policies, and considered racially inferior to the majority population (Evjen, Ryymin, & Andresen, 2021; Hansen & Olsen (2004). The southern Saami population living in both Norway and Sweden is a minority within the larger Saami society. *Båatsoe*, southern Saami reindeer herding, is considered to be crucial for maintaining southern Saami language, identity, and culture, and is protected by the Reindeer Herding Act (Ravna, 2020). Currently, Jillen Njaarke's yearly migratory pattern between different seasonal pastures spans nine municipalities in the Helgeland region. Four families and around 20 affiliated persons own reindeer in a herd which is collectively cared for by Jillen Njaarke's members.

The Øyfjellet project consists of 72 wind turbines and connected infrastructure aiming to produce 1.2 TWh annually.<sup>18</sup> In consultations during the licensing process,

<sup>17</sup> Corporate Social Responsibility.

<sup>18</sup> "Project fact file" (Øyfjelletvind.no): <https://oyfjelletvind.no/en/project-fact-file/>. Retrieved 30.05.2022.



Jillen Njaarke expressed concern that the project would interrupt the migration route and violate their right to continue Saami reindeer herding culture according to article 27 of the ICCPR, incorporated into the Norwegian Human Rights Law. However, In 2016, the wind energy company Øyfjellet Wind AS<sup>19</sup> was granted a license from the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy (OED) on the condition that the licensee would facilitate a dialogue and reach an agreement with Jillen Njaarke on mitigation measures. Øyfjellet Wind claims that the project has broad local support through a benefit agreement with the municipality<sup>20</sup> and with over 100 landowners, individuals, and companies, but notes that no agreement is in place with Jillen Njaarke.<sup>21</sup> Swedish wind energy developer Eolus Vind AB<sup>22</sup> is responsible for constructing and operating the project and was thus the main actor interacting with Jillen Njaarke during the research period. Despite lack of consent from Jillen Njaarke, the license authorities and Eolus Vind asserted that coexistence was possible and necessary to comply with Norway's renewable energy goals. Both Eolus Vind and Øyfjellet Wind lack publicly available guidelines on stakeholder engagement and Indigenous peoples' rights, but claim they are willing to "go far" to reach an agreement with the reindeer herding community.<sup>23</sup> Neither company responded to my email request to confirm if such guidelines exist.

Before Eolus Vind was legally granted the right to begin the construction in December 2019, Jillen Njaarke was consulted by NVE. The consultation concerned the required detail plan Eolus Vind had submitted in May 2019, which Jillen Njaarke asserted was in violation of the license condition. The plan was submitted before the completion of an impact assessment by Protect Sápmi, a Saami consultancy firm that was commissioned to assess the impacts from a Saami epistemological perspective. Eolus Vind argued they had done what they could to reach an agreement and was running out of time to comply with the deadline to obtain state subsidies through the so-called green certificate schemes.<sup>24</sup> The consultation meeting took place in Mussere on the 27th of August 2019, and the following section ethnographically outlines and discusses the conflicting lines concerning the process and its content.

## The State-Led Consultation: A Process in Good Faith?

"Consultations should be carried out in good faith, right? I think that is a good point of departure", one of the bureaucrats from NVE says when he opens the meeting. In addition to three reindeer herders from Jillen Njaarke and two bureaucrats from

<sup>19</sup> "About us. Our organization and business partners" (Oyfjelletvind.no): <https://oyfjelletvind.no/om-oss/>. Retrieved 30.05.2022.

<sup>20</sup> "Vindkraftavtale sikrer 26 millioner årlig til Vefsn kommune" (Oyfjelletvind.no): <https://oyfjelletvind.no/vindkraftavtale-sikrer-26-millioner-arlig-til-vefsn-kommune/>. Retrieved 30.05.2022.

<sup>21</sup> "72 of 72 turbines in place" (Oyfjelletvind.no): <https://oyfjelletvind.no/72-av-72-turbiner-pa-plass/>. Retrieved 30.05.2022.

<sup>22</sup> "A pioneering spirit, expertise and good business sense has taken us a long way" (Eolusvind.com): <https://www.eolusvind.com/about-eolus/?lang=en>. Retrieved 30.05.2022.

<sup>23</sup> "Spørsmål og svar" (Oyfjelletvind.no): <https://oyfjelletvind.no/sporsmal-og-svar/#>. Retrieved 19.12.2022.

<sup>24</sup> "Elsertifikater": <https://www.nve.no/energi/virkemidler/elsertifikater/>



NVE, two observers from the Saami Parliament are in the room. Jillen Njaarke’s lawyer is also present to address potential rights violations, and a representative from Protect Sápmi has been invited to present the impact assessment report. We are sitting around a table at Fru Haugans in Mussere, the oldest hotel in Northern Norway. Ironically, the assigned meeting room for the day is named “Øyfellet”, and from the hotel garden we can see the mountain’s highest peak. Some of the turbines would be visible from here, if the project were to be built according to the initial plan, but aesthetic complaints from residents were taken into consideration and Eolus Vind agreed to relocate additional turbines to the western mountains—into an important migration route of Jillen Njaarke.

Although the NVE bureaucrat invited Jillen Njaarke to a process in “good faith”, the encounter quickly reveals unresolved tensions around core issues of the planned project and a general discontent with the way NVE manages consultations. A few minutes into the meeting, NVE informed us about an inspection of the construction site together with Eolus Vind and the municipality the following day. The reindeer herders were caught by surprise and Torstein<sup>25</sup> stated that it was not the first time the company planned to fly into the area without consulting them first. Ole-Henrik, another reindeer herder from Jillen Njaarke, elaborated on this concern:

If you are to understand the Saami use of the area, it is extremely important that we are present. It should have been an exclusive inspection only with the reindeer herding community. This is exactly why this is so difficult because you do not have any knowledge about Saami use of the area, and we must explain this around a table in a meeting room.

Following Jillen Njaarke’s statements, one of the observers from the Saami Parliament intervened and criticized NVE’s understanding and practice of the consultation agreement.

It is not a secret that we have had a process with NVE, where we have not yet agreed on how to consult. The way we see it, NVE uses them as mere information meetings while making decisions behind closed doors. The Saami Parliament expects NVE to be transparent about their views. Only then we can have effective consultations in good faith with the objective of reaching an agreement.

The observers from the Saami Parliament recommended that Jillen Njaarke include details about their position in the final protocol and explicitly state that they reject the project. NVE took note of the critique but denied that there was a violation of the consultation agreement. The Saami Parliament and NVE did not come to terms on this matter and this tension characterized the dynamic of the rest of the meeting.

<sup>25</sup> Anonymity of research participants is considered to be a standard ethical measure in most social science research. However, if agreed, decolonial and Indigenous methodologies encourage use of original names to ensure accountability, transparency, and acknowledgment of knowledge holders who contribute (Chilisa, 2011; Kovach, 2010; Löf & Stinnerbom, 2016). After evaluating risks and opportunities, Torstein Appfjell and Ole-Henrik Kappfjell from Jillen Njaarke decided that their names could be used.

The disagreement on *how* to consult was followed by contestations over *what* to consult and what constitutes an agreement. While NVE expected Jillen Njaarke to accept that the license had been approved and that this consultation should only include details concerning construction and mitigation measures, Jillen Njaarke emphasized their ancestral right to use the area and that they had never consented to the project. In the license approval, NVE and OED highlighted that they took reindeer herding interests and rights sufficiently into consideration by rejecting a wind energy project in the Rein fjellet mountain—another important area for Jillen Njaarke’s reindeer. According to Torstein, however, Jillen Njaarke was not really given any option.

I find it very unfortunate that two megaprojects were compared to each other in the decision (...) It has been pointed out that we consider Øyfjellet to be less harmful to reindeer herding than Rein fjellet, but it is a situation where you are pressured to choose which foot to be shot in.

Torstein’s statement explains how Jillen Njaarke was deprived of the right to say no to both projects and instead forced to choose between “two evils”. While the license authorities interpreted a priority between the projects as consent to legitimate both the process and the decision, Jillen Njaarke characterized it as a form of coercion. The embodied metaphor Torstein uses is a reminder of the violence inflicted by extractive industries on people who have a close connection to their lands (Sehlin MacNeil, 2017). The analogy of being shot in the leg emphasizes the strong relationship Saami reindeer herders have with the animals and the landscape in which reindeer herding is practiced (Johnsen et al., 2017). In this lifeworld, losing a part of this landscape is like losing a part of yourself.

### Contested Knowledges

The prioritized item on the consultation agenda set by NVE is a discussion of impacts, mitigation measures, and details of the construction plan. Here, Jillen Njaarke expressed their discontent with the lack of inclusion of *aerpiedaajroe*,<sup>26</sup> ancestral Saami reindeer herding knowledges and practices, and they characterize earlier meetings they have had with Eolus Vind on the matter as “chit-chat” leading nowhere. Since the “dialogue” began, Jillen Njaarke have argued that Eolus Vind should pay for an impact assessment from Protect Sápmi, a demand they declined, allegedly because it was too expensive. According to Torstein, Eolus Vind only agreed to finance the report when Jillen Njaarke appeared in the local newspaper under the headline “Alliance to save Øyfjellet: – Our goal is to stop the plans of the wind farm”<sup>27</sup> in October 2018 (Nilsen, 2018). By then, however, the license had already been issued and Eolus Vind decided to submit the construction plan to NVE in May 2019 before the Protect Sápmi report was completed.

<sup>26</sup> A Southern Saami term for inherited knowledges and practices.

<sup>27</sup> A meeting which the author of this article attended as an observer.

When NVE confirmed they would consult Jillen Njaarke on the construction plan, Eolus Vind commissioned their own consultants to assess and propose mitigation measures. Contrary to the Protect Sápmi report, Eolus Vind's consultants express that "it is uncertain how reindeer react to wind turbines during herding and migration" (Naturrestaurering, 2019) and suggest that the migration route could still be used if the reindeer herders were only willing to adapt. During the consultation, Jillen Njaarke's lawyer asks NVE to be careful not to rely on consultants who hold little trust among reindeer herders and who have been criticized for trivializing and generating doubt regarding research that shows negative impacts of wind energy projects on reindeer herding. A parallel critique can be drawn to the controversial Fosen Vind project by another southern Saami reindeer herding community, where the same consultants were hired by the wind energy company to legitimate the operation and to deny any violation of Saami rights. In that case, the conflict concerned friction between reindeer herding knowledge and natural sciences, but also revealed how Fosen Vind and OED strategically ignored all knowledge which threatened colonial and commercial interests (E. M. Fjellheim, *forthcoming*).

Next, the representative from Protect Sápmi presented the alternative impact assessment and emphasized that "Saami right holders must have sufficient information to make their informed decisions in cases concerning infrastructure development". Their methodology builds on Saami knowledge and terminology from reindeer herding, but also includes scientific research on impacts from infrastructure development on reindeer herding lands. While Eolus Vind's report only assesses impacts from the wind energy project, the Protect Sápmi report addresses the implications of cumulative impacts from all the encroachments approved by the Norwegian state, and which effect Jillen Njaarke's reindeer herding practices. The report concludes that the Øyfjellet project is one among a long list of challenges, from hydropower, mining, railroad, highways, agriculture, forestry tourism, recreation, mismanagement of predators, and climate change. If the project were to be realized, Jillen Njaarke would run a high risk of losing a crucial migration route and its surrounding pastureland. This not only has significant implications for reindeer herding practices, but also for Saami culture and social relations (Valio, Eira, & Granefjell, 2019).

### **Industrialization, Ancestral Reindeer Herding, and the Saami Landscape**

The Protect Sápmi representative asserted that Jillen Njaarke's primary position was to reject the project, but *if* the project were to be realized, the only viable solution would be to move all the turbines to the edge of the Øyfjellet mountain, as far away from the migration route in the western mountains as possible. He stressed that the construction plan required Jillen Njaarke to deviate from the traditional character of Saami reindeer herding, as Eolus Vind and their consultants suggested the use of mechanical transport to move the reindeer from one pasture to another during spring migration. He underlined that there was no guarantee that this measure would work because it replaced migration knowledges and practices which have been developed

and tested over many generations. This risk, he argued, should be borne by Eolus Vind and not by Jillen Njaarke.

Jillen Njaarke explained how they value ancestral migration and emphasized both the practical and cultural implications of the project. According to Ole-Henrik, the area impacted by wind energy infrastructure was not only important for pasture and migration, but also as a Saami landscape where reindeer, herders, and the surroundings have interacted for generations. Research on Saami landscape relations emphasizes how more-than-human relations and practices are important for the transmission of ancestral knowledge and worldview, as well as for strengthening Saami collective memory and identity formation (e.g. S. Fjellheim, 1995; S. Joks, Østmo, & Law, 2020). Based on such landscape relations, Ole-Henrik narrated an ideal use of the migration route from winter to spring pastures.

The impacts of this for us as reindeer owners are severe, if we cannot maintain a traditional migration, if we cannot have a reindeer herd that is, I have to say this in Southern Saami, a “juhtiedaemies krievvie”. It means that you have a herd who knows where it is going. We know from old Saami knowledge that it is during the spring migration that you tame the reindeer. Then you move quite far, it’s bright most of the day, and you spend a lot of time with the herd. The herd gets used to people and people get used to the reindeer. Young dogs and herders learn how to move with the herd, and you enjoy the journey without stress. When we have a “juhtiedaemies krievvie” we bear the fruits of this work when the calves are born, and we start the summer work. It is so tame that the work is easy. This is what we are losing with the industrialization of reindeer herding.

By “industrialization”, Ole-Henrik referred to increased use of mechanical transport of reindeer. In a conversation we had following the consultation,<sup>28</sup> he continued to reflect on why this is problematic. In the construction plan, Eolus Vind stressed that Jillen Njaarke and other reindeer herding communities already use trucks and boats during migration and argued that the impacts of the project would not interfere with current herding practices. Ole-Henrik explained to me that encroachments in the landscape and bad weather sometimes force them to use trucks, but that they strove to allow reindeer to move freely according to their natural pace. This is particularly important during spring migration because the herd is vulnerable after a long and harsh winter. Reindeer know when and how to move, as they remember their previous yearly seasonal migration. When they are moved by boats or trucks, they forget this knowledge and herders no longer need to herd. Ole-Henrik asserted that expectations to adapt to changes in society has a limit, which has already been crossed: “We have already gone through drastic change by adapting to a range of

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<sup>28</sup> Interview 10.11.2019.

industries and infrastructure developments. I ask myself how much longer we can call it *båatsoe*, and sustain our cultural practices?"<sup>29</sup>

The argument that reindeer herding is already "modernized" without severe impacts is frequently used by companies who promote coexistence between industrial development and Saami reindeer herding. It ignores, however, how mitigation measures, such as artificial feeding, fencing, and mechanical transport, are often applied as a response to climate change or to the loss of land from multiple industrial and infrastructure developments (E. M. Fjellheim, [forthcoming](#); Lawrence & Åhrén, 2016; Lawrence & Larsen, 2019). Forced mechanization and "domestication" of Saami reindeer herding not only compromise current ancestral practices, but might generate loss of traditional knowledge to the next generation (Riseth, 2012). The tradition–modernity dichotomy which underpins the assumptions Eolus Vind has of Jillen Njaarke's reindeer herding practices is moreover alien to Indigenous epistemologies and reduces them, either to something static and backward (Porsanger, 2011; Smith, 2012), or to something that must accept any kind of change. The Southern Saami term *aerpievuekie*<sup>30</sup> better explains what Saami reindeer herders mean when they defend "traditional" herding practices and why they may both embrace and reject, for instance, technological solutions. *Aerpie*<sup>31</sup> means "inheritance" and refers to transmission from generation to generation. *Vuekie*<sup>32</sup> refers to ways of doing or behaving, customs and ethics, implying certain norms and values. From this perspective, "customs, innovations, wisdom, knowledge, values, heritage, and continuity are inseparable from each other" (Porsanger, 2011, p. 241) and not something that is opposed to "modernity". Jillen Njaarke's practices and choices are guided by accountability to ensure the wellbeing of the reindeer, as expressed by reindeer herding communities elsewhere (Larsen, Staffansson, Omma, & Lawrence, 2022).

## The Corporate Dialogue: Construction Begins

In December 2019, a few months after the consultation between NVE and Jillen Njaarke, the construction plan was approved with few modifications. NVE considered the consultation to be successful,<sup>33</sup> and in their decision they argued that Jillen Njaarke had been given the opportunity to influence the project on several occasions. They suggested that construction work should be stopped during spring migration, but that Jillen Njaarke would need to move the reindeer "effectively". The approval reaffirmed that an agreement with Jillen Njaarke on mitigation measures should be in place before construction could begin (NVE, 2019). However, the following communication between the lawyers of Jillen Njaarke and Eolus Vind was characterized by unresolved tensions from previous attempts at dialogue. While Jillen Njaarke argued they needed at least six weeks to carry out ancestral migration, Eolus

<sup>29</sup> Interview 10.11.2019.

<sup>30</sup> *Aerpievuekie* is equivalent to *árbevierru* in Northern Saami.

<sup>31</sup> *Aerie* is equivalent to *árpie* in Northern Saami.

<sup>32</sup> *Vuekie* is equivalent to *vierru* in Northern Saami.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with a bureaucrat from NVE, 23.09.2019.

Vind offered to stop the construction for one day to facilitate migration through the construction site. By the deadline (10th of March of 2020), no agreement was in place. NVE thus intervened and decided the construction should stop for four weeks, but Eolus Vind appealed to OED who immediately ruled that further delays would inflict financial damage on the company.

When Eolus Vind finally broke ground and started to construct a road in April 2020, the conflict escalated. Ole-Henrik later explained to Novara Media how the situation turned dramatic as they were forced to gather and chase their reindeer with helicopters during three days. The only mitigation measure provided by Eolus Vind was a satellite phone Jillen Njaarke could use to alert the construction workers of their transit. “This wasn’t a spring migration; we were forced to flee (...) If our ancestors saw us, they would give us a hard time. They would tell us that this is not a good way to herd them”, Ole-Henrik remarked (Reid-Collins, 2020). Instead of embarking on one of the most beautiful journeys of the year, the spring migration became a nightmare for Jillen Njaarke. They worried about the reindeer who are vulnerable to stress after a long and harsh winter and thus more exposed to predators and miscarriage of calves.

On the 11th of May 2020, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) invited Aili Keskitalo, the president of the Saami parliament, and Tony Tiller, the state secretary of OED, to discuss the dramatic spring migration and the unresolved conflict between Jillen Njaarke, Eolus Vind, and OED. Tiller was concerned about the “millions that would go to waste if [the company] was not able to continue the construction” and insisted that Norway has a very good “track-record” of taking reindeer herders’ interests into consideration. Keskitalo expressed that the Saami trust in the licensing process is at a breaking point, and that the Ministry *de facto* has delegated its responsibility of safeguarding human rights to the company (NRK, 2020).

In September 2020, Jillen Njaarke appealed for a temporary injunction against the construction until the validity of the license could be resolved in court, but this was denied by the Bailiff in Oslo District Court a month later. During the hearing, Eolus Vind and Øyffjellet Wind assured the court that Jillen Njaarke had been consulted by NVE and OED during all stages of the licensing process and denied that the project is in any violation of human rights.<sup>34</sup> The court ruled in favor of the companies who stated they had done what they could to facilitate a dialogue and reach an agreement with Jillen Njaarke on mitigation measures. The verdict concluded that Jillen Njaarke’s right to practice Saami culture through ancestral reindeer herding can be safeguarded by actively herding the reindeer or using mechanical transport to move through the project site. Jillen Njaarke had to pay a total of 1.7 million NOK, equivalent to 180,000 USD, and their appeal to a higher court was rejected.<sup>35</sup> To support Jillen Njaarke, the national anti-wind energy movement *Motvind* raised 1 million NOK to pay for the court expenses (Greger, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Courtroom ethnography at the Bailiff in Oslo, the 21–24 of September 2020.

<sup>35</sup> “Oslo Byfogdembete kjennelse”: <https://enerwe.no/files/2020/10/13/Kjennelse.pdf>. Retrieved 19.12.2022.

## Coercion, Erasure, and Racism

The court's refusal of Jillen Njaarke's attempt to halt the project shifted the power asymmetry even more in favor of Eolus Vind. The following winter (2020–2021), the company insisted Jillen Njaarke could use other winter pastures on the coast, although Jillen Njaarke considered them to be overgrazed and in need of regeneration. The migration was delayed, and Jillen Njaarke was not able to slaughter and give the reindeer vaccines in time (Wærstad, 2021). According to Ole-Henrik, they were forced to enter into a short-term agreement with Eolus Vind on how to carry out the migration that year, in order to ensure pastures for the reindeer for the winter. He argued the situation was against "any democratic principles" and remarked: "It is strange that we are forced into an agreement after the construction has already begun. This way, we have no opportunity to negotiate. We can hold the pen, but they decide what we write (...) it's coercion".<sup>36</sup> Eolus Vind, on the other hand, portrayed the agreement as a good solution in the regional newspaper (Engås, 2021):

The fact that we have an agreement shows that it is entirely possible to meet and come up with good solutions. We at Eolus, at least, want to find solutions where traditional reindeer herding and new green energy production can coexist.

Here, Eolus Vind takes coexistence for granted and insinuates that Jillen Njaarke has not been "constructive in discussions and meetings", as affirmed by their webpage.<sup>37</sup>

The third winter after the construction began (2021–2022), the delayed migration led reindeer to look for green pastures in the lowlands, and local farmers claimed their crops were destroyed (Engås, 2022). According to Ole-Henrik, Jillen Njaarke were stigmatized and blamed for their supposed unwillingness to resolve the conflict on a pro-wind energy page on Facebook.<sup>38</sup> The commentators accused the reindeer herders of obstructing job opportunities and development in the municipality and suggested that they were greedy for compensation. One of the comments resulted in a police report for hate speech (Johansson, 2020). "Everyday racism prevails",<sup>39</sup> Ole-Henrik sighed when he reflected on the comments which are not unusual in public discourse about Saami reindeer herding rights (e.g., Berg-Nordlie, 2022; E. M. Fjellheim, 2020a). However, he was more concerned with how Norway's green transition agenda devalues and renders Saami existence invisible. For instance, a local politician expressed that there were no reindeer to be seen at Øyfjellet, insinuating that Jillen Njaarke were not truthful when arguing that the area is crucial for pasture and migration.<sup>40</sup> The same way the presence of reindeer is denied, the voices of Saami reindeer herders is rendered invisible in decision-making concerning wind energy development.

<sup>36</sup> Interview 21.07.2021.

<sup>37</sup> "FAQ": <https://eolusvind.no/faq/>. Retrieved 30.05.2022 (no longer available).

<sup>38</sup> "Medvind – Bygg ut Øyfjellet" (Accessed 18. Aug., 2022): <https://www.facebook.com/groups/930708977375629>

<sup>39</sup> Interview 21.07.2021.

<sup>40</sup> Interview 21.07.2021.



Why do they not say it outright, that there is no room for an Indigenous people and our livelihood here in these municipalities? That this green transition takes precedence over everything else, so we have to sacrifice a good deal for this to be realized?<sup>41</sup>

Ole-Henrik said he was provoked by the fact that the license authorities simply assume that Saami interests should align with Norway's green transition agenda: "I dare say that I am not equal. I am an invisible party when it comes to consultations. Even if the Sami Parliament is involved, and even though we argue well and have lawyers, we are not listened to".<sup>42</sup> Ole-Henrik is not the only who has raised this critique. During a protest carried out by neighboring reindeer herding community against another wind energy project in 2015, young reindeer herder Ina-Theres Sparrok expressed that wind energy development represents the majority society's racism and cultural genocide because it denies the Saami the opportunity to continue ancestral reindeer herding in the future (Bye, Olsen, & Trana, 2015).

Ole-Henrik continued to reflect on why power asymmetries prevail, remarking that the problem concerns not only the implementation of existing laws, but also how political and legal structures are developed from a non-Saami perspective.

Is it really that strange? (...) Saami legal perception, livelihood and morals are not taken into consideration in Norwegian law and resource management, so how can I expect to show up at a consultation meeting which lasts two hours, and try to explain my way of life and future? (...) It is not good enough to invite us to a nice lunch at Fru Haugans hotel.<sup>43</sup>

Ole-Henrik refuses to recognize Indigenous peoples' "rights" based in colonial laws (Coulthard, 2014; Kuokkanen, 2019) and believes that a "radical change is needed"<sup>44</sup> for ancestral reindeer herding and the Saami landscape to persist. He emphasizes that license authorities and the majority population in Norway need to respect the Saami as an equal negotiating party. Compensation and mitigation measures are insufficient to remedy the destruction of the landscape which constitutes the foundation of the very Saami being: "You cannot buy a Saami soul. A Saami soul needs to be free. It belongs to our lands".<sup>45</sup>

## **"Dialogues" in a Nordic-Saami Green Colonial Context: A Critical Juxtaposition**

In this section, I unpack how Jillen Njaarke's experiences and contestations over state consultation and corporate dialogue can be understood in conversation with experiences and tendencies identified in literature from Latin America. As

<sup>41</sup> Interview 31.03.2022.

<sup>42</sup> Interview 31.03.2022.

<sup>43</sup> Interview 31.03.2022.

<sup>44</sup> Interview 31.03.2022.

<sup>45</sup> Interview 31.03.2022.

mentioned earlier, categories from Rodríguez-Garavito (2011) are helpful to organize the analysis around a broader set of literature, which I return to in the following.

## Displacement

*Displacement* concerns how “consultation’s procedural steps displace, replace, or postpone the more substantive conflicts” with procedural norms and compensation (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011, p. 292). In an emblematic case in Colombia, the Constitutional court ruled that the Embera people’s right to consultation had been violated in the construction of the Urrá dam, and that consent would be required in future encroachments on Indigenous lands. However, the project had already destroyed the Sinú river and ecological basis for the Embera people’s ancestral fishing and hunting practices, consequently threatening their self-sufficiency and cultural survival. The monetary compensation ordered by the court created a dynamic of economic dependency on the company and cultural change. In the struggle against plans to expand the dam, the Embera found themselves absorbed with how they could apply the Constitutional Court’s precedence on consultation and consent, while facing continuous threats from armed groups affiliated with the corporate interests on their territories (ibid.).

Although Jillen Njaarke was consulted prior to the license decision, NVE ignored their lack of consent to the license based on the argument that mitigation measures could avoid a violation of their right to continue Saami reindeer herding culture. By insisting that Jillen Njaarke and Eolus Vind should come to an agreement, the state license authorities waived their responsibility to safeguard Saami rights, displacing the conflict to a forced dialogue with the company. The court’s ruling that Eolus Vind adequately attempted to reach an agreement reduced Jillen Njaarke’s opportunity to influence the outcome to a mere right to procedure, in accordance with the neo-liberal and business-friendly interpretation of consultations and FPIC in Latin America (Dunlap, 2018; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). Finally, the court recommended the same mechanism for conflict resolution which had failed earlier in the process: dialogue.

## Miscommunication

*Miscommunication* refers to epistemic frictions between different ways of knowing (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). In Latin America, epistemic struggles often take place outside of formal spaces of consultation. For instance, Indigenous communities in Guatemala and Ecuador turn to community-based monitoring and external networks of experts and allies to challenge poor quality research and corporate science in EIAs of controversial mining projects (Aguilar-Støen & Hirsch, 2017; E Leifsen et al., 2017a). Although Jillen Njaarke was formally consulted, the process and final decision of the state consultation ignored Jillen Njaarke’s *aerpiedaajroe* and *aerpievuekie*. Jillen Njaarke thus turned to the Saami consultancy firm Protect Sápmi who addressed these omissions and argued the reindeer herders’ informed consent

had been violated throughout the process. The disagreement between Jillen Njaarke, NVE, and Eolus Vind did not only concern “facts” about how reindeer react to wind energy infrastructure, but also what Saami reindeer herding culture is and ought to be (E. M. Fjellheim, [forthcoming](#); Lawrence & Larsen, 2017). While the construction plan sought to facilitate “an effective migration of the reindeer within a designated timeframe”, Jillen Njaarke valued *aerpievuekie* and a “juhtiedaemies krieveie” to ensure transfer of *aerpiedaajroe* and to maintain a meaningful relationship with the Saami landscape.

The disregard of ancestral Saami reindeer herding knowledges and landscape relations is a form of violence which resonates with Sousa Santos (2015) concept of *epistemicide*—the destruction of Indigenous and other than “Western” knowledges and lifeworlds by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. Protect Sápmi’s assessment was financed after the license had already been granted and its report was ignored by Eolus Vind in the elaboration of the construction plan. Instead, Eolus Vind chose consultants who generated doubt about scientific research that confirmed the negative impacts identified by Saami reindeer herders. The conflict thus goes beyond epistemic difference between the “Indigenous” and the “Western”; Eolus Vind strategically ignored any knowledge which threatened their commercial interests (E. M. Fjellheim, [forthcoming](#); Kirsch, 2014; Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008).

## Domination

*Domination* in consultation procedures found in Latin America concern the power asymmetry and multiple expressions of violence which permeate the relationships between Indigenous peoples, companies, and states (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). Rodríguez-Garavito’s analysis is situated within a critique of global capitalism and its dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ lands. In a study of wind energy development in Oaxaca, Mexico, Dunlap (2018, p. 105) interprets consultation and FPIC procedures as a form of inclusionary control which “enforce colonial law and protect corporate investments”. The Øyffjellet case similarly reveals how the Norwegian state continues to reproduce colonial relations with the Saami through bureaucratic and legal structures that allow the wind energy industry to dispossess and fragment Saami reindeer herding lands in the name of climate action (E. M. Fjellheim, [forthcoming](#); Kuokkanen, 2022; Lawrence, 2014; Normann, 2020). Saami rights-holders have better access to political and legal institutions than Indigenous peoples in Latin America, but neither state license authorities nor the court recognized Jillen Njaarke’s warnings of the destructive effects of the project. The power imbalance was also manifested by economic disparity, as Jillen Njaarke hold substantially less capital to commission alternative impact assessments and hire legal assistance. The more “quiet, soft-spoken (...) understated, polite and bureaucratic” (Reinert, 2019) acts of domination that characterize the Nordic-Saami colonial context can be difficult to identify and denunciate. As expressed by Ole-Henrik, the system renders Saami voices and lifeworlds invisible and the final decision is always made by the state.

"There is no negotiation when you have a gun to your head", said a leader from the national Indigenous organization ONIC when referring to the coercive and violent conditions in which consultations over extractive industries take place in Colombia (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011, p. 299). While Indigenous peoples in Latin America risk death threats and execution if they refuse to consent to extractive projects, Jillen Njaarke's experience resonates with a form of "subtle colonizer maneuver" disguised as progressive politics typical for the Nordic states (Kuokkanen, 2020). It concords, however, with violence as a structural phenomenon (Galtung, 1969) enabled through a settler colonial "elimination" of Indigenous cultures by means of the fragmentation and dispossession of their lands (Kuokkanen, 2020; Wolfe, 2006). Jillen Njaarke was not threatened by guns, but the false choice offered between two large wind energy projects in the licensing process felt like choosing which leg to be shot in. Similarly, the forced dialogue and expected agreement with Eolus Vind was a form of coercion. In a struggle for the continued survival of Saami reindeer herding culture, Jillen Njaarke's experiences resonate with Keskitalo's critique of dialogue as a deadly weapon.

## Emancipation

Displacement, miscommunication, and domination predominated in the state consultation and corporate dialogue Jillen Njaarke experienced. Despite these constraints, however, Jillen Njaarke continued to engage in ways which afforded limited but some strategic benefits and a sense of emancipation (E Leifsen et al., 2017b; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011), e.g., by expressing a clear resistance to the project, questioning the epistemic foundation and coercive methods used to legitimate consent, and critiquing the very structures within which the "dialogues" took place. Although not extended on here, the constrained participation stimulated means to build alliances with others and develop new political tactics which could be explored in future studies. Jillen Njaarke strategically engaged with a diverse network of actors, which e.g. supported their struggle by raising funds for the court case (Greger, 2020), facilitated attention in international news (E. M. Fjellheim et al., 2020; Reid-Collins, 2020), encouraged investors to divest from the project,<sup>46</sup> and demanded the project to be immediately stopped (Fallmyr, 2020). One achievement resulting from this endeavor was the Norwegian Bank Storebrand's (2022) announcement to put Eolus Vind on their list of observation for potential violation of their human rights policy for responsible investment.

In future quests for emancipatory effects, Saami reindeer herding communities might also consider looking into experiences from Latin America, where Indigenous peoples engage in autonomous processes as a response to failed state compliance with their rights. For instance, Indigenous communities in Guatemala and Colombia have organized community consultations independent of state and corporate control, exercising their right to self-determination by rejecting large-scale mining and hydropower projects through popular referendums (McNeish, 2017; Xiloj, 2019).

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<sup>46</sup> Email communication with Silje Karine Muotka, member of the Norwegian Saami Parliament Council, 27.03.2020.

## “Dialogues” as Racism?

The four overlapping categories discussed above focus on whether or to what degree state consultation and corporate dialogue serve to strengthen claims for Indigenous rights to ancestral lands and practices. Informed by Grégoire’s (2019) work on the Canadian mining industry in Guatemala, I suggest that there is also a need to critically assess the political and normative underpinnings of “dialogues” as prescription of good governance and conflict resolution in Norway. Grégoire argues that the promotion and implementation of Canada’s CSR strategy and mining interests fit well with Guatemala’s post-conflict political dynamics of dialogue, while upholding the racist discourse of the oligarchy toward Indigenous peoples who resist mining. In other words, the Guatemalan elite’s racism toward Indigenous peoples has advantaged Canadian mining interests. The dominant discourse around dialogue as a mechanism in mining governance is based on the premises that: “Society and mining companies share the same interests; the problem is conflict itself, not underlying substantive issues; and conflict arises from communication problems and incorrect perceptions” (Ibid, p. 692). This portrays Indigenous peoples as ignorant troublemakers, instead of recognizing them as rights-holders with different onto-epistemological proposals to how society should “develop.”

Unlike Guatemala, trust in political and legal processes and human rights compliance is considered high in Norway (Kleven, 2016), and stakeholder engagement is closely linked to the agenda of the welfare state (Ihlen & Von Weltzien Hoivik, 2015). Norway’s commitment to peace and reconciliation diplomacy abroad<sup>47</sup> strengthens the perception of a political culture grounded in dialogue as solution to conflict. In the Øyfjellet case, the state secretary claimed that Norway has a good “track-record” concerning Indigenous rights, and the license authorities assumed that “dialogues” automatically could resolve the conflict between the reindeer herders and the wind energy developer. However, the forced dialogue with Eolus Vind only exacerbated and aggravated the very conflict it intended to resolve.

Norway’s self-image is exempt of racism toward the Saami and other ethnic minorities, although such exceptionalism has been critiqued, e.g., in studies on education (Dankertsen, 2019; Eriksen, 2022; Loftsdottir & Jensen, 2012). Studies on wind energy conflicts elsewhere in Saepmie emphasise how colonial rationales are reproduced when Saami reindeer herding is sacrificed to meet renewable energy goals (Kuokkanen, 2022; Lawrence, 2014). Racism in Norway is not only expressed by hate speech, but also manifested through structures and processes which render Saami voices invisible (Berg-Nordlie, 2022). As asserted by Ole-Henrik, Saami reindeer herders are blamed in public discourse for being greedy and an economic burden to the larger society, and Saami knowledges and practices are not respected in political decisions. As in Grégoire’s (2019) study from Guatemala, the Øyfjellet conflict shows that the Norwegian state considers “dialogues” as the main means to solve the conflict, but in practice the process and outcome ignored Jillen Njaarke’s epistemic

<sup>47</sup> “Norway’s engagement in peace processes since 1993” (02. Dec., 2019); [https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/foreign-affairs/peace-and-reconciliation-efforts/innsiktsmappe/peace\\_efforts/id732943/](https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/foreign-affairs/peace-and-reconciliation-efforts/innsiktsmappe/peace_efforts/id732943/)

foundation and human rights claims. The premises and discourses underpinning the state consultation and corporate dialogue thus reproduce the paternalist notions that 1) wind energy and Saami reindeer herding can coexist, *i.e., the state knows best what constitutes significant negative impacts*; 2) "dialogues" produce solutions if only herders are willing to collaborate, *i.e. reindeer herders are not constructive and do not know their own good*; and 3) reindeer herding has a duty to adapt to the production of wind energy, *i.e., renewable energy is a more important solution to climate change than ancestral Saami stewardship of the landscape*. Wind energy as a "green" mode of colonial dispossession adds a moral imperative which exacerbates the pressure for consent and renders it even more difficult to critique and contest "democratic" processes defined and led by state and corporate actors.

## Final Remarks

This article provides critical perspectives on the practices, discourses, and premises of state consultation and corporate dialogue in Norway through a study of a conflict over the Øyfjellet wind energy project on the ancestral reindeer herding lands of Jillen Njaarke. Juxtaposed with findings from Indigenous territorial struggles in Latin America, the study contributes with new perspectives on wind energy governance and green colonialism in a Nordic-Saami context.

The domination experienced by Jillen Njaarke is subtler than the brutal violence inflicted on Indigenous peoples in Latin America. The Øyfjellet study reminds us, however, that colonial violence and racism may take various forms, and that there is a need to further scrutinise the implications of "dialogues" as prescription of good governance and conflict resolution in states where democracy and compliance with Indigenous peoples' rights are perceived as high. In Latin America, a crucial factor explaining the gap between policy and implementation of consultation, FPIC and Indigenous peoples' rights, is the weak presence of states (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2011). However, the experiences and contestations of Jillen Njaarke challenge the perception of Norway as a strong welfare state representing "best practice." The problem is not dialogue itself, but rather how it is used to displace the root cause of the conflict it is supposed to resolve; to ignore and erase Indigenous peoples' knowledges and practices; and to facilitate the interest of the powerful—in this case dispossess Saami ancestral lands to pave the way for a dominant green transition agenda.

Decolonial approaches to the global climate and ecological crisis are needed to identify and shift the power asymmetry which constrains Indigenous emancipation and self-determination (Batel & Küpers, 2022; Dunlap, 2019; Normann, 2020). This is difficult as long as the current structures allow license authorities to overrule lack of consent and ignore the epistemic foundations of impacted Saami reindeer herding communities. When "dialogues" automatically are expected to lead to an agreement it not only disrespects the Saami peoples' right to self-determination over their culture. It also fails to recognize that radically distinct lifeworlds, values, and land-use

practices might not be reconciled. Future research might explore conflicts over resource extraction, not as “something negative that must be overcome or reduced by dialogue, but rather as a potential catalyst for social change” (Rodríguez & Inturias, 2018, p. 94).

While this article has focused on lessons learned for Saepmie, future juxtapositions might explore how Indigenous geographies elsewhere can learn from the Saami green colonial experiences and critique, as the dominant climate change- and green transition agenda presumably will expand pressure on Indigenous lands in the future.

## Epilogue

A few months before submitting this paper, Ole-Henrik eagerly called to tell me that he has GPS tracked an *aaltoe* (a female reindeer) who was unable to join the herd’s migration from the winter pastures due to the conflict with Eolus Vind. She had returned to the summer pasture all by herself, using an ancestral migration route. According to Ole-Henrik, this proves why it is so important to recognize ancestral knowledges of both Saami herders and the reindeer.

The value we have created together with the reindeer herd is built on the dressage we do. It is amazing when we team up with nature and use the intangible knowledge and traditions we have learned and when it can be documented with technology! But it also shows how fragile it is. That is why I am preoccupied with migration by foot and not on the asphalt by trailer in the spring. If we hadn’t done that, *aaltoe* wouldn’t have come wandering by herself. This is Saami traditional knowledge. It is a terrible shame that reindeer herding becomes so modernized that all this knowledge disappears.<sup>48</sup>

**Acknowledgements** The author thanks Jillen Njaarke Sijte for their indispensable knowledge and year-long struggles to maintain southern Saami reindeer herding and its landscape, and for their collaboration in the research process—*Jijnjh gæjhtoe*. The author also thanks colleagues at the Centre for Sámi Studies at UiT—The Arctic University of Norway, for valuable insights and support, and the anonymous reviewers for constructive comments and suggestions for improving the manuscript.

**Funding** Open access funding provided by UiT The Arctic University of Norway (incl University Hospital of North Norway) The study is funded by the Norwegian Research Council through the project TRIARC—The Arctic Governance Triangle: Government, Indigenous Peoples, and industry in change.

## Declarations

**Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate** The research project has been approved by the Norwegian National Center and Archive for Research Data, NSD. The participants have given their informed consent to participate in the study.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication 08.07.2022.



**Conflict of Interest** The author declares no competing interests.

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