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***“A constant reminder of what we had to forfeit”: Swedish industrial colonialism and intergenerational effects on Sámi living conditions in the area of upper Stuor Julevädno***

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### **About the author**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the intergenerational effects of hydropower expansion on Sámi living conditions. In-depth conversations were conducted with five research participants from three different generations living in a hydropower impacted area on the Swedish side of Sápmi. The aim is to analyse how natural resource extraction has affected living conditions for the Indigenous Sámi people, using an intergenerational approach. The questions cover how to deal with the consequences and how coping strategies have affected the living conditions for the research participants and the participants' families, both older and younger generations. Historical unresolved grief connected to large-scale resource extraction is an important component for understanding experiences of colonialism in a Nordic Indigenous context. Furthermore, an intergenerational approach is essential for studying long-term impacts on Indigenous communities. From the conversations, four main themes are crystallised: bereavement, fear and worries, agreements with the energy company, and reconciliation and strategies for the future.

### **Keywords**

intergenerational trauma, industrial colonialism, hydropower, Sámi, Indigenous people

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For more than 100 years, hydropower has been extracted from the waters of Sápmi, devastating vast amounts of land and water. Sápmi refers to the traditional land of the Indigenous Sámi people, as well as to the Sámi people and their language (Amft, 2000, p. 13). Geographically, Sápmi spans four countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola peninsula of Russia. Reindeer herding, fishing, hunting and handicraft are traditional Sámi livelihoods. In Sweden, reindeer herding is an exclusively Sámi livelihood; the reindeer herding area is divided into 51 reindeer herding communities (RHCs), 34 of which are affected by at least one hydropower plant or dam, with 28 affected by three or more (see RHC maps, Sámi Parliament, 2019). In previous research, Swedish hydropower extraction in Sápmi has been analysed with a focus on the political framework. This found hydropower functioned as *Industrial Colonialism*, resulting in loss of land, loss of rights and livelihoods, and the need to mobilise opposition against pressure from the surrounding society (Össbo, 2014). The overarching aim of this study is to analyse how decades of industrial colonialism through hydropower extraction have impacted the living conditions of Sámi people in the area of the upper Stuur Julevädno, using an intergenerational approach.

### **Studying lived experiences of environmental change**

In recent years, research on people's experiences of anthropogenic changes in the physical environment has developed concepts such as *solastalgia*, which sheds light on environmentally induced anxiety and distress. The term was coined by environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht (2005) in relation to an Australian Indigenous context and has been used, for example, in studies examining people's experiences of living in the vicinity of a mine (Albrecht et al., 2007; Askland & Bunn, 2018; Blåhed, 2020). In a health impact assessment of a planned mine in Sápmi, Blåhed (2020) points out that Sámi experiences were not only linked to the environmental destruction and losing land but also to the anxiety of losing a way of life for themselves and their children.

Research examining environmental change and loss of places in northern communities has shown how research participants talk about happiness and wellbeing before the loss of land and places. Feelings of anxiety, fear, vulnerability and even desperation characterise the time after loss. It was also common to have a feeling of confusion and powerlessness towards the forces of society. The notion that these emotions were passed on to the next generation was also reported (Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Meriläinen-Hyvärinen, 2016). Sámi experiences of hydropower development have emerged in several publications that testify to the extensive adaptation and knowledge challenges as well as loss of knowledge that environmental transformation entails. Narratives point both to powerlessness against state-owned companies and authorities and to the fact that important alliances have been concluded with, for example, nongovernment organisations (NGOs; Hanes, 2001; Hermanstrand & Kosmo, 2009; Mustonen et al., 2010; Mustonen & Syrjämäki, 2013).

The study of an environmental intervention that has been going on for generations needs to have an intergenerational perspective. While *solastalgia* is defined as the "lived experience" of pain linked to the transformation of and assault on the place where you live and which you love (Albrecht, 2005), a concept is needed to describe the situation when these experiences are passed on to next generations.

### **Intergenerational trauma and extractive violence**

Health research relating to Indigenous peoples and the impacts from colonisation has used the concept of historical trauma or historical trauma response (HTR; Yellow Horse Brave Heart et al., 2011; Bombay et al., 2014). Historical or intergenerational trauma stems from a series of historical events perpetrated on both a collective and individual level against a group of people, including

their environment, with genocidal or ethnocidal intent. Initially, the concept was developed within studies relating to survivors of the Holocaust (Sotero, 2006). Historical and intergenerational trauma is likely to be found in the backwaters of colonialism (Walters et al., 2011).

Although rooted in (colonial) history, the violations of historical trauma permeate the present; it produces and reproduces trauma effects. These effects threaten “the cultural continuity and the capacity to reclaim and preserve the integrity of [I]ndigenous knowledge systems” (Lawson-Te Aho, 2014, p. 183). One component of HTR is historical unresolved grief, described by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart et al. (2011, p. 283) as a ‘profound unsettled bereavement resulting from cumulative devastating losses’. Historical unresolved grief resulting from large-scale natural resource extraction is an important component for understanding the experiences of colonialism in a Nordic Indigenous context.

In clinical studies from North America, a Historical Loss Scale was developed in order to “assess the frequency with which people think about the historically traumatic events and losses”, a scale to “capture emotional responses to these losses” (Yellow Horse Brave Heart et al., 2011, p. 285). Lawson-Te Aho (2014) emphasises that as time and generations go by, “the source of the wounding becomes more difficult to see and name, creating a necessity for de-colonisation, a psychological tool to place colonisation impacts in a consciousness frame-work” (p. 184)

The focus of this study is to show historical loss as an outcome of hydropower expansion. Furthermore, it is to show responses to these losses as actual and ongoing impacts from industrial colonialism, and to discuss the strategies for the future identified by the participants. In a Sámi context, Pirak Sikku (2013, 2015) has asked the question “Can sorrow be inherited?” Through several art projects relating to experiences of historical injustices perpetrated against the Sámi, specifically the examinations conducted for the purpose of racial biology to “prove” Sámi inferiority to the Germanic “race”, Pirak Sikku found that sorrow can be inherited; it is an intergenerational unsettled grief. In this article, I connect the concept of historical loss to the lived reality shared by Sámi participants in this study.

One important aspect of describing the concept in intergenerational terms rather than as plainly historical, is that the state and responsible authorities use the historical dimension as an argument for not addressing the current questions of compensation to stakeholders, and not reassessing the conditions of exploitation (Össbo, 2018). In the Nordic context, extraction of natural resources has a long history and has thus affected generations of Sámi. Actual construction of hydropower dams has not been undertaken on the Swedish side since the early 1990s,<sup>1</sup> and in official investigations hydropower is taken for granted and regarded as a problem settled in history, with the only issue left to be resolved concerning water biology (Össbo, 2018). A bridge for understanding the effects of hydropower expansion is the concept of extractive violence developed by Sehlin MacNeil (2017), as “a form of direct violence against people and/or animals and nature, caused by extractivism, which predominantly affects peoples closely connected to land” (p. 39). It is a part of a violence triangle where the direct violence rests upon the structural and cultural violence embedded in legislations and values in the general public (Sehlin MacNeil, 2017).

## **Methodology**

This study is based on narratives of research participants on the Swedish side of Sápmi in an area close to Jåhkåmåhkke/Jokkmokk. This region also has a high amount of large-scale hydropower plants and dams along the river valley. The state-owned company Vattenfall has extracted hydroelectric power for over 100 years through several power plants and hydro dams, including

the large-scale reservoir at Suorvvá. The two branches of the Julevädno (or Lule River) run through the valley and are a seasonal reindeer herding route.

For this study, I conducted five in-depth conversations with five research participants who are also members of the Sirges RHC, although not all of them are active on a full-time basis. The research participants were recruited through a snowball sampling method (Morgan, 2008). Initial contact was with the chair of the local Sámi association, who enabled me to find participants representing three generations, and with an equal gender distribution: three men and two women from the area directly affected by the Suorvvá dam. By three generations, I mean grandparent generation, parent generation and child generation (although adult). The conversations were conducted following a yarning method (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 38) that involves both researcher and participant giving and receiving information in an interview situation, described as a journey embarked on by researcher and participant together. The method is based on a relation-building process that goes beyond the interview situation and is accountable to the shared experiences throughout the research process (Sehlin MacNeil, 2017). In the conversations, the researcher was not the only one allowed to ask questions; several participants raised questions about, for instance, certain aspects of hydropower policies, and I answered on a best effort basis.

The conversations were conducted on four occasions in the home of the participant, involving an initial coffee break or a dinner as a break. One conversation took place at the participant's workplace, after work time. The conversations were recorded and transcribed, and the recorded part of the conversations lasted from 1.5 to 3 hours. The anonymisation of the participants follows the order of our conversations; thus conversation A refers to the first conversation conducted and E to the last. Our conversations focused on how to deal with the consequences, positive as well as negative, of hydropower development, and how the consequences and subsequent coping strategies have affected the living conditions of the research participants and the participants' families, both older and younger generations.

## **Findings**

Analysis of the conversations crystallised important themes. The first theme is the bereavement following loss of land and the legacy of forced dislocations, the devastation of the migration routes of reindeer herding, and the loss of traditional knowledge surrounding the lost routes and routines; bereavement also encapsulates the economisation of traditional livelihoods. The second theme is the fear and constant worries that occupy the participants, caused by the changed and changing landscape. The third theme is the agreement with the energy company, which in different ways burdens participants from all generations. The fourth theme of reconciliation and strategies for the future includes the difficulties of showing whether there actually can be any positive outcomes from hydropower extraction, and further thoughts on reconciliation and strategies for the future. In the following, the themes will be described and analysed according to intergenerational trauma.

### **Bereavement, loss of pathways and knowledge**

“Lake systems have always been the best reindeer migration paths, it's possible to travel both at night and during bad weather. Nowadays it's impossible on this lake system” (Conversation A). For an experienced reindeer herder, the impact of the dam and the regulated water system concerns both humans and animals; it is no longer possible to use the old migration routes on and alongside the river and lakes since the latest damming of Suorvvá was concluded in 1972. And gradually, reindeer herders have had to start transporting their animals by truck.

According to several research participants, this routine of arriving at a new grazing area by truck and not on foot interrupts the natural orientation of the reindeer—who migrate from the coastal or forest area in early spring to the alpine areas where they dwell in the summer—and causes difficulties in navigating in their landscape (Conversations A, C). The reindeer tend to stay longer in the winter areas—the forest region—which creates a problem, since Swedish legislation stipulates the date when grazing is no longer allowed in the winter areas (Conversations A, B, C; Swedish Reindeer Husbandry Act, 1971). This hydropower-imposed circumstance risks the result of additional work for herders, conflicts with other local inhabitants, and increases the risk that reindeer might migrate to neighbouring RHCs, which creates an economic loss (Conversations A, C); a triple-headed complexity of problems, ultimately created by the state.

With new migration routines, the actual pathways in the landscape deteriorate (Conversation A). In addition, traditions and knowledge surrounding the older ways of doing things are endangered; this was described as a sorrow by the younger research participants. Only a few times have they moved with the reindeer herd “on foot”, and they fear that the next generation will never get that opportunity. As one participant put it:

When you move [on foot with the animals from winter grazing land to summer grazing land] you learn about the places and sites you pass by in an area you otherwise hardly would attend, in that way, but you also learn so very much about how you tend the animals. It's a multitude of knowledge getting lost. (Conversation C)

Reindeer herding, Sámi language, and traditional knowledge and livelihoods are valued as the core of Sámi belonging among all research participants. Therefore, the loss of traditional knowledge is alarming; it threatens the very cultural continuity and integrity of Indigenous knowledge systems described by Lawson-Te Aho (2014), and is likely to cause trauma, individually as well as on a collective basis within a group, characterised by long-term reliance on intergenerational knowledge sharing.

Two participants reflected upon the difficulties of teaching the next generation about all the conditions that have to be borne in mind when it comes to a regulated lake (Conversations D, E). This is new and important knowledge concerning regulated lakes.

A watercourse can be regulated for hydropower purposes and for an annual regulated lake; this usually means that water is saved from the spring flood until the winter when electricity is needed. Among other things, this results in the water surface being raised until it starts to freeze, then the surface is lowered and ice conditions can become very difficult to predict.

The consequences of the damming are seen from different perspectives, depending on age; for those who experienced the landscape before the latest damming conducted in the early 1970s, the loss of cherished places is certainly present to this day, with memories of different ways of living and being on the land and lakes (Conversations A, D). While the younger generation has been “born into it” (Conversation A)—it has always been a part of their everyday life—they still perceive the grief of former generations (Conversations C, D). One participant emphasised:

In the long run, the legacy we ought to have is gone and it has also pressed us into a form of modernisation, the huts are gone, everyone lives in a cabin now. If I compare with them others who grew up at another Sámi camp, they have grown up living in a hut. That's a cultural heritage being wrecked. (Conversation E)

The impact of hydropower on the landscape and the lakes affects the length of time the Sámi stay at the summer camp. They tend to stay a shorter and shorter time every year, and the younger generations are only there for a few weeks. All participants say this is due to the insecurity of the ice and lakes, inconvenience, lack of modern living standards, the need for young people to have a job in the wider society, and the fact that young people have shorter vacations (Conversations A, B, C, D, E). The most obvious consequence among all research participants is the effects on the migration routes and the possibility to travel on the lakes, be it summer or winter. The traditional Sámi way of living and travelling has been curtailed by damming.

### ***Economisation***

Another consequence stressed by the participants following the loss of land is the economisation of traditional livelihoods. Transporting reindeer with trucks requires revenues from other livelihoods, as well as from reindeer herding: “Most folks have something on the side, you have to otherwise it wouldn’t work. No one can rely solely on herding” (Conversation B). In the past, subsistence fishing and fishing to sell were livelihoods usually combined with reindeer herding. Many women conducted the family’s subsistence fishing (Conversation A; see also Össbo, 2014). Today, fishing in the regulated waters has become difficult and expensive because one has to be out on the larger and more dangerous lakes, have proper and secure boats and harbours, and the fishing nets get damaged due to driftwood from the dam on the uncleared lake floor. Although fishing is still perceived as a part of everyday life during the summer, few engage in professional fishing nowadays (Conversations A, B, D). The serial damming of Julevädno has also resulted in the disappearance of certain game fish, such as salmon, and a reduction of the quantity of Arctic char (Conversations B, C; e.g. see Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, 2013).

### ***Legacy of forced dislocation***

Several participants are descendants from Sámi on whom the state forced dislocation from an area in the northernmost part of Sweden in the 1910s and 1920s, and that historical wound still produces distress and conflict all across Sápmi.

I think it influences especially the two generations that are older than me, those who were exposed to it, ... it’s like a double sorrow for them; they were forced to dislocate and leave their old homes and then they got betrayed by the State when their new homes [at Vájsáluokta] were to be dammed, on the very place where they had been directed to build. Not only one time but several times, then you feel that’s such a tremendous ... it has obscured years of their lives, their entire lives have been affected ... you get very sad for their sake. But still, you can’t feel their grief in the way they do, and you get sad when your parents tell you about the sorrow they’ve carried from their parents. (Conversation C)

The citation shows how hurtful experiences can be borne over generations and result in historical unresolved grief. One participant remembers the stories their mother told about the beauty and prosperity of the land and water before the hydro damming, and how people and nature were treated by the company, and how this must have affected her wellbeing (Conversation A). Another participant found strength in the ancestors’ efforts to hold on to reindeer herding and to adapt to a new landscape (Conversation D). The new language was an additional adaptation element: the dislocated Sámi spoke Davvisámegiella (North Sámi) and moved to an area where the Sámi spoke Julevsámegiella (Lule Sámi). But the behaviour of the authorities mirrors the cynicism of state politics: first a group of Sámi were forced to move from their homelands and then they were directed to an area that was intended to be flooded by a hydropower reservoir (Conversation C). Many Sámi with the legacy of forced dislocation had to relocate several times (Conversation E)

due to the Suorvvá dam that was extended on four occasions from 1923 to 1972, with a final amplitude of 30 metres. On the other hand, the Sámi who lived in the area of Vájsáluokta before the forced dislocations were eventually compelled by the authorities to give up their ancestral land and were directed to another part of the community's grazing district (Hanes, 2001).

Bereavement is a response to the historical trauma of the damming of Suorvvá, including the loss of land and places, and the knowledge and memories connected to them. It is also a loss of comfort and solace from the land and environment (Albrecht, 2005). The bereavement causes sorrow that is borne over generations as an unresolved grief (Yellow Horse Brave Heart et al., 2011), apparent, although in varying degrees, in all of the research participants' narratives. In addition to the knowledge loss, the gaining of new knowledge concerning regulated lakes relates more to the second theme of fear and constant worries.

### **Fear and constant worries**

A regulated water system varies in water level in an unnatural way; the water from spring floods is saved behind the dam in the reservoirs over the summer. The Suorvvá reservoir was transformed from seven interconnected lakes to one inland sea; and gradually, through every new damming, the reservoir lost more and more of its coves and islets, leaving no safe harbours in which to run ashore, so making it extremely hard to travel by boat (Össbo, 2014).

Sometimes it's like low water with kilometres of muddy shores for us to travel in and to pull our boats through, and when it is high water, no shores at all to land our boats at. With life at stake, we cross that great unruly hydropower sea, constantly exposed to that worry: something might happen to people travelling on the water, the lake behaves differently depending on the water stage, and it is impossible to gain knowledge on a regulated lake. (Conversation D)

During the winter months, when the demand for electricity is high, water is released through the dams, causing more unreliable ice conditions on the usually frozen reservoir and downriver water systems. The following describes what is often the daily work of a reindeer herder:

You get deadly nervous when they're [reindeer] out on the ice, you keep to the shorelines but if the reindeer go over the ice, then you have to speed up to bring them back but that is risky. It doesn't feel all that good to have to take that kind of risk in your work. (Conversation B)

One distinguishable effect of the consequences from hydropower expansion is the constant worries occupying the participants; worries about people travelling on the reservoir, worries about the reindeer migrating on the ice of a regulated lake or stream, worries about all the necessary devices and belongings to be able to live at camp Vájsáluokta or Sáltoluokta. "You have to hoist the boat pretty high because you will not return in a couple of weeks and then you don't know what the water level will be" (Conversation B).

It's a constant worry there, you hardly sleep when it begins to storm, you check on the boat, if you have it necessarily high at the shore. And if you haven't, it gets waterlogged and you can lose it. And then you have to run and wake your closest relatives to get them to help you handle the boat in the middle of the night if its needed. Constant worries about the boat, engines, fishing nets and things you store down there, constant worry if someone travels on waters and if it begins to storm, because it changes in half a shake, constant worry about spring ice, afraid something will happen to members of the family or someone else in the community. (Conversation D)

These worries have a substantial effect, being very hands-on and connected to daily life. Without prompting, four research participants brought up the question of drowning mishaps and drownings due to the unreliable water system (Conversations B, C, D, E)<sup>2</sup>; some of them had close relatives who had drowned and can also see how this impacts the living conditions for the survivors:

She had several in her family who passed away through drowning, so the lake scares her although she has grown up right here ... and knows how treacherous it can be to travel on the ice if it's weakening, so it affects her, she can't stay up there in the spring for as long as she'd wish or need. (Conversation C)

Historical trauma as well as ongoing trauma responses were found in the constant struggle with the environment imposed by hydropower. One participant was worried about how to avoid transferring the worries to the next generation. The participant could clearly see how the worries and fear result in restraints that he or she had placed and continue to place on the children, which in turn causes problems in living a Sámi life (Conversation D). One participant reported that the energy company Vattenfall had never taken any responsibility for drownings; from their perspective, it is up to every individual to take precautions (Conversation C). This behaviour on the part of the company may fuel feelings of unresolved grief in the local community. If the company has unfulfilled security obligations, they risk the accidents increasing. While certain responsibilities have been decided in court during the permission process, every research participant reported obligations that were not met. The research participants all gave evidence of an overall mistrust in, and resignation towards Vattenfall as a result of the company's handling of court processes and agreements, and decades of trying to avoid their responsibilities.

## Agreements

One year, they [the energy company, Vattenfall] were all the way down to the bottom and restored the dam at its root. They had to lower the water level to the original level, ... they freed the dam foot and you didn't want to go up on the summit; if so, you could see all the way up to the shores where we live, large plains ... They call it "green electricity", but I call it grey electricity. Of course, it's cheap for Vattenfall, just a bunch of Sámi that they've drowned. (Conversation A)

The company, today known as Vattenfall, was established as the State Power Board in 1909, with the assignment to stimulate and produce domestic electricity. At Julevädno, Vattenfall is the sole operator and ought to have a certain responsibility as a state-owned corporation and administrative authority.

The Swedish Water Act was enacted in 1918 and special water courts were established in the country to handle the permit processes for hydropower. According to the law, a dam did not receive a permit unless the financial balance sheet weighed in favour of the project (Össbo, 2014). There was therefore an inherent reason for the companies to find the cheapest solutions possible. Not paying attention to certain stakeholders can be seen as a method of keeping costs down.

In the early stages of the Suorvvá permission process, during the end of the 1910s and beginning of the 1920s, the impact on reindeer herding was underestimated, and the compensation for the difficulties and lost pastures were considered to be taken from the charges the State Power Board had paid for damage to common interests (Össbo, 2014). In the later processes, when the Water Court estimated the compensation for technical possessions such as huts, sheds, boats and fishing nets, only a very small compensation was offered. For one large hut, the father of one participant received 15,000 SEK, while one man resisted taking money and demanded Vattenfall build him a new hut above the damming limit:



We used to, for fun sake, conclude the costs and compare with what we gained, 350-400 SEK was the cost for building his new hut. It was surely a difference.... We all should have refused money, at least it would have laid a heavier cost on Vattenfall. (Conversation A)

When the third damming of Suorvvá was processed in the 1950s, the RHC became liable for payment, in theory, for the extra benefit that the road and other installations brought, according to Vattenfall's estimations, but it was offset against the damage from damming. "They calculated in that way; they were very cynical" (Conversation A). To avoid the unjust situation and loss from getting no compensation from the third damming, the board members of the RHC were forced to opt for another strategy in the court process on the fourth damming of Suorvvá. This was, according to one research participant, by far no real free choice; Vattenfall almost demanded to sign a contract with the RHC. There were two contracts, one concerning fishing and the other pertaining to reindeer herding. The RHC received a sum of money and some of the members wanted to save a large sum for future needs, but in the end, it was decided that the lion's share be handed out to individuals. Individuals were liable for tax and it resulted in an enormous tax underpayment. Several members were forced to take loans to pay the tax debt (Conversation A). Once again, an unjust and almost cynical turn of events was perpetrated, caused by the state's exploitation of Sámi land:

We thought, when we signed the contract, that it should be estimated with twenty-five years depreciation ... but the Tax Agency decided to judge it as one-year payment. I've read the decision. It was because we didn't own the property, we're just using it, that's why we got the tax on one year.... We tried to appeal to higher court but, no. That was also an abuse of justice. (Conversation A)

In Sweden, most of the year-round reindeer grazing lands in the alpine areas, usually utilised during summer, are considered state property. However, the state has no deeds to the lands, only administrative rulings and legislations that eventually dispossessed the Sámi of their taxed lands, lands they had used both individually and collectively from time immemorial (Lundmark, 2006).

The question of the contract is a current issue, since the RHC has lost its copy and Vattenfall may have lost it as well. The third party involved was the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency (Kammarkollegiet), the authority that guards common interests in Sweden. The contract was settled in the 1980s and, according to one research participant, Vattenfall wanted to get rid of many obligations and instead pay monetary compensation (Conversation A). Several obligations became paid off in money, money that eventually burdened the individuals as a tax debt.

Questions concerning what was actually compensated and agreed upon arise when one part constantly refers to a contract that is inaccessible for the other party. In the upcoming review of hydropower permits this could be a question that has to be considered—the obligations of the company in terms of environmental measures.

Within the RHC and the local Sámi Association, this issue of the contract is problematic; the younger generation wants to know the older generation's requests and claims in the agreement (Conversations B, C, D). This could risk disunion within the community. Although the younger generation seems to understand the circumstances under which the former generations negotiated (Conversations B, E)—"decisions taken as survival strategies during colonisation were not necessarily out of a framework of genuine freedom of choice" (Lawson-Te Aho, 2014, p. 187)—it exists as a burden or heritage from the concealed contracts that further supports the mistrust of Vattenfall. At the same time, there is a fear of what will happen in the future when

individuals, from both parties, with certain knowledge of the contract and agreements, eventually change place with a new generation. If there was any goodwill in the former generations' relations, that could also be gone (Conversation D). Loss of intergenerational knowledge about agreements can cause powerlessness in negotiation processes. The agreement and the lost contract are not only historical unsolved questions that cause grief and mistrust over generations; the issue is also closely connected to historical loss, and the contract is a kind of record of the community's losses and a testimony of how these losses were valued.

### **Reconciliation and strategies for the future**

Almost every one of the participants has worked in some way for Vattenfall and reported how their ancestors had done the same. The damming resulted in measures that gave seasonal work, and for those who needed extra money it surely contributed to their subsistence; clearance by the lakes is a recurrent and indispensable activity due to varying water levels, although there seems to be agreement between the participants on the question that Vattenfall could spend more money on these measures. The access roads, railways and other infrastructure installed during the construction that caused a "surplus benefit" has definitely facilitated travelling (Conversations A, B), but the benefit is also largely accessible to the general public, and not only to those who actually paid for it—that is, the RHC, who also lost other compensation measures or indemnification in the hydropower process. In addition, the infrastructure connected to "the surplus benefit" was a compensation for a changed and lost accessibility in the landscape, and is also a constant reminder of the cynicism in the process where the state, through its civil services, and the Water Court are ultimately responsible. The forced adaptations and modernisation can be seen as an additional trauma or as trauma responses to the damming.

One participant said they would be really better off without the road, referring to the increased traffic and how everything comes with a price, and how complicated it is to drive and get a parking lot at the road end: "If I had to choose there would be no road, it shouldn't be so easy for them [tourists] to get here. Then we had to travel in the old way, by boat" (Conversation E).

I'm dependent on being able to get the boat down by myself ... there is a handcar [a small railroad car propelled by hand, managed by Vattenfall] in Ritsem to use ... but now it has been out of order the last few summers and the negligence of Vattenfall to not ... it surely narrows the way I'm used to living my life. (Conversation D)

This is one example that mirrors how Vattenfall has created solutions that have, in reality, led to dependency, and it then neglects to fulfil its duty. Small but effective steps that have affected the participants negatively.

According to all the participants, Vattenfall has obligations to attend to certain agreed assets and to manage winter roads over the lakes and ice, but in recent years it seems to forget old agreements (Conversations A, B, C, D, E). One participant had experienced how Vattenfall tends to change the definitions, arguing that "winter" ends in March, although for the RHC, winter has always been until the end of April (Conversation B). It is an argument that, with definitions in old agreements and in contracts that are lost, is creating insecurity—legally, physically and psychologically.

Although it is convenient for people to have electricity, it does not change the fact that in the parts where the participants feel they are most affected, that convenience is nullified: there is no electricity in the camp village at Vájsáluokta. Instead, villagers have their own solar panels funded by themselves, and some have diesel-electric generators, gas refrigerators or earth cellars, as in

the old days. The Sámi association has arranged for freezers to store food on the opposite side of the lake at Rijtsem. But again, they must travel over that lake and be dependent on the weather. “You can’t decide on your own when to get your meat or something, even at that point you’re affected” (Conversation D); and “we have more expensive electricity than Southern Sweden” (Conversation A).

According to all the participants, there are in fact measures that Vattenfall could take that would be small measures for a multibillion-dollar company, to actually ease the living conditions for those who are affected. But the will seems to be nonexistent (Conversations A, B, C, D, E). Proposals as well as claims are dismissed with the argument “it’s terminally adjusted in the contract” (Conversation D).

When I took off [from Vájsáloukta], I stopped by Suorvvá. Once it was such a node, a place where it always was hustle and bustle ... I glanced at the gigantic hydropower dam and in a way I felt the tide of history, on the one hand the importance of having this industrialisation and on the other to have to sacrifice all this and the sorrow that the ones being most haunted haven’t been taken care of, that concern doesn’t exist.... When you call upon these places, you get a constant reminder of what we had to forfeit for this welfare, we ought to be grateful for what we have in Sweden, more people ought to know what we had to forfeit.... It’s not only the Sámi, but many, many others, places and people, families that have been very troubled by this rampaging, it’s an important job to be done, a form of reconciliation work with people in these parts of the country. (Conversation D)

Among all research participants there is an understanding of the importance of the energy extraction for the purpose of the evolving welfare state, but an enormous grief over the way the landscape, themselves, and many others in the sparsely populated northern parts of Sweden have been and still are being treated by the state and by Vattenfall as the responsible company.

### ***Sámi philosophies and view of life***

It doesn’t have to be bitterness, but related feelings to all this, and that picture I hope we [the younger generation] will not pass on. That we, sort of ... nowadays people often talk about how to reconcile something—well, maybe I don’t mean exactly that—but we ought to, in some way, not leave this behind us either, at least we ought to work it through in our generation and find an approach towards it, that is plainly—better, yes. (Conversation E)

Among the younger research participants there is a kind of diplomacy; a way of looking at every angle to learn about the arguments of the opposite side. Being connected to reindeer herding means a constant exposure to the threats of the demands from natural resource extractions and land-use interests. They are already experienced in the importance of, for instance, navigating and being responsive to local opinion.

You plainly have to adapt and I think that Sámi and reindeer herding today develop and adapt very promptly to societal development and that’s one reason why we still can wear the gákti [traditional clothes] with pride and have kept reindeer herding. And I think, if we were against progress, we wouldn’t still be here today. (Conversation C)

At the same time, the consequences have really changed the very foundations of life for the research participants—it has “obstructed the continuing of our way of living, the Sámi way of living ... it has dug a deep hole in us” (Conversation D). The obstruction, the loss and the constant reminders of historical injustices from the state and its tentacles have fostered an irrepressible will and a sense to not feel bitterness. There is a kind of stoicism to keep on living at the Sámi camp at the hydropower reservoir, although it could be better and it was concluded that the energy

company has a lot to do when it comes to relationship-building (Conversations C, D, E). For Lawson-Te Aho (2014, p. 189) “narratives of pain co-occur with narratives of survival” and “consciousness might lead to a determination to overcome the debilitating effects of trauma through psychological and spiritual resistance—a refusal to lose hope and give in to trauma”. That strategy can be found in the participants’ narratives, as well as in the Sámi method of “birget”, a North Sámi word meaning “getting along” or “coping with”, and which encapsulates silent resistance and survivance rather than victimisation (Evjen & Lehtola 2019). However, in a recent study on cultural meanings of suicide in Sámi communities in Norway, the “birgetkultuvvra” or the ideal of “managing by yourself”, which is a Sámi way of bringing up children, has been problematised. It “might result in inadequate problem solving”, identified as a tendency to avoid to “communicate ... distress, or ask for help” (Stoor et al., 2019, p. 6).

One participant used the word *resilient* to be able to feel the wellbeing when everything works fine and to be able to handle setbacks as they appear. Another participant talked about *reindeer luck* and how personal wellbeing and prosperous reindeer herding relies upon how the herder relates to and treats the reindeer and the surrounding environment (Conversations C, E). Reindeer luck is a Sámi philosophy, and compared with fishing luck or dog luck, reindeer luck is not solely reliant on how you treat the animal but refers to something more comprehensive: how you live and act as a human. Furthermore, reindeer luck is given to you personally; you cannot wish it on others as with fishing luck or dog luck (Oskal, 1999). What happens when external factors affect the possibility of acting in one’s own environment? That clash of Western and Indigenous philosophies causes stress and may be seen as a component in devastating mental wellbeing within Indigenous communities.

In case of any further hydropower extraction, the participants consider the present generation to be well prepared—through the legacy and experience of the older generations, as well as the increasing number of younger people receiving higher education. They have confidence in Sámiid Riikasearvi (National Association of Sámi in Sweden) for advice and assistance. Several participants insisted that they will not be treated in the way that former generations had to endure. While it is evident that this is because of a Sámi storytelling culture that has transferred experiences from the elders (Conversations B, C, D), other participants recounted difficulties for many, both older and younger people, in talking about feelings in relation to the hydropower expansion (Conversations A, E). Furthermore, the consequences of hydropower expansion alongside the other intrusions and cumulative effects have added to reasons for people committing suicide (Conversation E).

However, additional hydropower expansion is not valued as a risk, and more attention is being given to the mining concession at Gállok, located in between the two branches of Julevädno (Conversations B, C). For the future, some believe and hope that the next generation will be better prepared (Conversation C). But some consider the future of reindeer herding is not so promising because of the competing land use, economisation and the great loss of land that the Sámi have experienced and continue to experience (Conversations A, B). “If we had all the land that we used to have, we could stay in the mountains during those harsh winters, in the forest-land” (Conversation A).

One participant articulated the importance for the Swedish state to reconcile with the Sámi people, and that it is an asset to have an Indigenous people; and, in a time when impacts on the climate from beef meat industry are discussed, reindeer herding should be considered as an asset (Conversation C). Reconciliation and reciprocal relationships ought to be held as important, not

only by the Indigenous people, but also by the surrounding society as a part of the colonial past and present.

## **Conclusion**

Hydropower extraction has affected the Sámi community in several ways that are in line with experiences reported in research with people living in environmentally changes areas: anxiety, fear, vulnerability and powerlessness, as well as resilience and transmitted grief between the generations (Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Meriläinen-Hyvärinen, 2016). The participants in this study emphasised the impacts from the loss of land on the reindeer migration routes, and additional losses such as loss of knowledge and circumscribed ways of living. They articulated the constant worries that the changed landscape provokes, and the problems with concealed agreements with the hydropower company. From the consequences they had experienced, strategies for the future were articulated: to opt for some kind of reconciliation, or at least a wish for more sensitivity, reciprocity and responsibility from Vattenfall.

The processes that have led to the present situation can be seen through the lens of extractive violence; the actions of the power company, as well as other authorities and the court processes, show the discriminating structures and cultures supporting the indisputable devastation of land and water in Sápmi. The reindeer-herding Sámi were initially not even considered as tenants on state-owned land with the right to indemnification; they were plainly removed. In the subsequent processes, discriminating structures prevailed in the despicable compensations that were offered and in the contract that ceded almost every future responsibility into a single payment that created huge tax bills. The multiple damming of the lake and the neglect of long-term obligations to ease the consequences for the Sámi comprise a direct extractive violence against the Sámi community and their strong connection to the land.

A finding of this study is that trauma, sorrow and distress as effects of this extractive violence can be borne over generations, especially for people who are connected to the landscape and certain traditions, which is often the case in Indigenous cultures and societies. It was obvious that the research participants value the continuation of traditions, as well as the need of space for development and optional modernisation. They grieve the loss of traditional knowledge that is underway, due to new and unwanted adaptation to the damming, which has caused distress.

Sámi philosophies are valued as strengths, but these may also clash with Western philosophies, which can cause stress. The hydropower-imposed adaptations and decreased living space with, for instance, motorised transport between fragmented grazing areas, might indicate that the participants' way of life is not congruent with the principles of reindeer luck, which may in the long term affect their wellbeing. Furthermore, the economy was often referred to, mirroring the fear of bereavement that economic loss can lead to, and that the participant may have to quit reindeer herding. This can also be seen through the lens of economisation discourse; in the Water Court cases, as well as the modern environmental cases, the language is not adapted to Indigenous values but favours the language of compensation in strictly economic terms. This is evident when it comes to the history of the Suorvvá case and Vattenfall's efforts to buy off the stakeholders instead of approving long-term compensational measures and obligations.

This intergenerational trauma has historical causes, as well as present and future impacts. The participants may not mourn in the same way as the generations before them (Pirak Sikku, 2015), but as legacy bearers (Lawson-Te Aho, 2014), they feel the impact of previous injustices brought to them in narratives from older relatives and in ongoing injustices and losses. Trauma and loss of

solace is mirrored in experiences of threats to everyday life as well as in work—fear of death, additional bereavement, and failing traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding and fishing, or just not being able to live a Sámi life. Ongoing impacts may force one generation to transfer their worries and sorrow to the next generation. The worries of transferring fear, sorrow and exasperation to the next generation was present and influences how the participants lead their lives. As legacy bearers of several historical injustices, they also find empowerment in the adaptability of the generations before them and in their own abilities. A strategy to face rather than to forget the causes of the intergenerational wounds is evident in the participants' narratives. This strategy creates a platform to seek responsible relations, instead of victimisation (Vizenor, 1999) when talking about the historical injustices and company obligations yet to be fulfilled.

## Epilogue

The knowledge of what happened in the past causes grief but also strength in demands; one participant described the damming, the Nomadic school system and the Swedish assimilation policy as part of a “package” perpetrated on the Sámi (Conversation E). Even though restitution from Vattenfall for every concealed obligation is seen as unlikely to happen, or will take a very long time to pursue through court cases (Conversation B), the very fact and evidence of the damming ought to provide a stepping stone for the Sámi community in this area to argue against further resource extractions. But as this paper is written, the question of the mine in Gállok is still on the government's table for a decision to be made about whether a British mining company will be given permission to establish a mine in the lands of the RHCs that are also troubled by the hydropower extraction in the two branches of Julevädno, showing the constant external pressure of competing land use on the local Sámi community.

## Interviews

Conversation A 2019-06-24  
Conversation B 2019-06-25  
Conversation C 2019-08-12  
Conversation D 2019-08-13  
Conversation E 2019-09-17

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<sup>1</sup> The last new construction was the Klippen power plant, although in 2010 a plant was commissioned at Abelvattnet dam, using the existing dam and tunnel.

<sup>2</sup> The question was never articulated in the conversations by the researcher but brought up by the participants.