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Sápmi, Sweden's *Smörgåsbord*?

On Human Rights, Rights of Nature and Extractivism

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Abstract

In North Sweden, Sámi activists are resisting the proposed Gállok mine, disapproving of their land being treated as a *smörgåsbord* and countering the assumption of modernity that dichotomises the human and the nonhuman. Against this backdrop, this thesis looks at some of the unprecedented challenges the rapid extension of globalisation poses to the human and nonhuman world. In response to these challenges, the Swedish Sámi Parliament endorsed the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (UDRME)* in 2018. This study asks; what are the implications of the Sámi Parliament adopting a Rights of Nature (RoN) declaration politically and ontologically? Is there a Sámi-specific ontology underlying the adoption of the UDRME? To what extent can RoN and human rights mitigate the effects of extractivism in Sápmi? In order to find answers to these questions, the first part of this study consults a political ontology frame of reference and decolonial theory. In the second part, these contemplations are complemented with the content analysis of social media interactions from local activists, interviews and ethnographic observations from a field trip to Jokkmokk. With this approach, this thesis seeks to methodologise human rights by examining their role in the conflict of the Gállok mine together with Rights of Nature. This thesis contends that both human rights and RoN have a limited capacity to cure the ills of extractivist practices as long as they remain complicit with colonialism. However, it also suggests constructive measures of reflexive criticism and the importance of dialogue between Western-trained and indigenous scholars.

Keywords: *Rights of Nature – Extractivism – Human Rights – Decolonisation – Ontologies – Self-determination*

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1 Introduction

“If the project [that of globalisation plus] has become impossible, it’s because there is no Earth capable of containing its ideal of progress, emancipation, and development. As a result, all forms of belonging are undergoing metamorphosis - belonging to the globe, to the world, to the provinces, to particular plots of ground, to the world market, to lands or traditions.”¹

In Jokkmokk, North Sweden, a group of local activists are in a decade-long struggle against a proposed open-pit iron ore mine. This manifests itself as a battle between extractivist visions, human rights claims and rights beyond the human.² On the way to Jokkmokk, a sign at Boden Central Station indicates: “1094 km from Stockholm” (Fieldnotes, p. 1). To reach Jokkmokk, it is yet another 140 km inland. Notwithstanding, the influence of the government in Stockholm and the global rush for resources is unmistakable in this remote place in the Arctic Circle. The assumption of northern Sweden being ‘empty land’³ generates human rights violations and resource exploitation in the guise of progress and development.⁴ Having proposed the “Gállok”⁵ mine in 2006, as of 2022 the British company Beowulf has received the green light from the Swedish government to continue with test drilling.⁶ Ever since, the local (Sámi) people have been struggling to get their voices heard, fighting against an extractivist vision and for their cultural survival, fearing the violation of their human rights as indigenous peoples. In this way, Gállok is the epitome of a phenomenon that Bruno Latour describes in the above quote: the unsustainability of the globalisation project, with barely any land left to contain its flawed ideals. Consequently, notions of belonging are highly contested between the global market and local traditions. On a Fridays for Future protest in Jokkmokk, witnessed by the author during fieldwork, young Sámi and non-Sámi activists

¹ B. Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), p. 16.

² S. Persson, D. Harnesk, and M. Islar, 'What Local People? Examining the Gállok Mining Conflict and the Rights of the Sámi Population in Terms of Justice and Power', *Geoforum*, 86 (2017), 20-29.

³ T. Lundberg Tuorda, 'Life as a Sami Activist. My Struggle for a Mining Free Gállok – Jokkmokk and Kvikkjokk', in M. Öhman, H. Maruyama & J. Gärdebo (ed.), *Re: Mindings. Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges* (Stockholm: Vulkan, 2014).

⁴ A. Bergman Rosamond, 'Perspectives on Security in the Arctic Area', in Danish Institute for International Studies (ed.), (2011).

⁵ Gállok' or in its Swedish form 'Kallak' is the place name of the area between Björkholmen and Randijaur in the municipality of Jokkmokk. In a spirit to acknowledge the importance of the place to Sámi heritage, the author has made a conscious choice to refer to it as Gállok.

⁶ Beowulf Mining Plc, 'Kallak - Iron Ore. Exploitation Concession', <<https://beowulfmining.com/projects/sweden/kallak/#overview>>, accessed April 3rd 2022.

shouted “*Sápmi är inget smörgåsbord!*”. This exclamation translates to English as “Sápmi is not a buffet table!” and it accompanies the local protests against the mine. In Swedish culture, *Smörgåsbord* refers to a cold buffet, a table of different kinds of dishes. Moreover, it is the metaphorical celebration of plenty, used in order to say that there is something for everyone to take. Thus, the slogan points out the limits of Sápmi, indicating an ontological conflict.

Against this backdrop, this thesis looks at some of the unprecedented challenges the rapid extension of globalisation poses to the human and nonhuman world. For human rights scholarship, this challenge denotes addressing a human rights crisis and an ecological crisis at once. With Sweden being the EU’s leading iron producer, plus a significant producer of copper, zinc, lead, gold and silver, extractivist practices such as mining form a considerable part of the country’s economy and politics.⁷ At the same time, Sweden enjoys a reputation of being both socially and environmentally progressive, putting itself at the forefront of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda.⁸ In response to this discrepancy, the Sámi Parliament of Sweden has endorsed the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* (UDRME) in 2018, proclaimed in 2010 at the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia. The Rights of Nature (RoN) movement is figurative of the hope to address some of the shortcomings of human rights, especially in light of the threats resource exploitation and climate change pose to the land of indigenous peoples and their livelihood worldwide.⁹

By drawing on data gathered from social media interactions and public statements from activists, complemented by ethnographic observations, this thesis asks: What are the ontological premises of human rights and Rights of Nature in the Gállok conflict and to what extent can they respectively mitigate the detrimental effects of extractivism in Sápmi?

⁷ V. Vogl, M. Åhman, and L. J. Nilsson, 'The Making of Green Steel in the EU: A Policy Evaluation for the Early Commercialization Phase', *Climate Policy*, 21/1 (2020), 78-92.

⁸ Government Offices Of Sweden, *Voluntary National Review*, 2021; Swedish Institute, 'Free Speech, Free Press and Overall Openness and Transparency Are Key to Swedish Society.', <<https://sweden.se/life/democracy/openness-in-sweden>>, accessed January 10th 2022.

⁹ L. Viaene, 'Can Rights of Nature Save Us from the Anthropocene Catastrophe? Some Critical Reflections from the Field', *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, (2022), 1-20.

1.1 Unpacking the Research Questions

The Sámi Parliament's 2018 signing of the UDRME forms the cornerstone of many emerging questions that this thesis centres around the guiding question;

- What are the ontological premises of human rights and Rights of Nature in the Gállok conflict and to what extent can they respectively mitigate the detrimental effects of extractivism in Sápmi?

From this follows a set of subsequent questions:

- What are the implications of the Sámi Parliament adopting a Rights of Nature declaration on the political and ontological level?
- Is there a Sámi-specific ontology that lies behind the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*? Or is it merely political?
- If so, can the RoN framework be an instrument against the extractivist practices that human rights have failed to prevent?
- Can RoN be a tool of decolonisation?

To unpack these questions on the conceptual level, the three main components constituting the research problem will be dissected: human rights, Rights of Nature and extractivism. Extractivism is enabled by an assumption that dichotomises the human and the nonhuman, culture and nature. These assumptions are also all too prominent in Euro-American thinking, including in the discipline of human rights. Rights of Nature in turn, are often depicted as a tool to counter these dichotomies. Based on the interconnection of human rights, extractivism and the rights of nature, these three concepts will be revisited and analysed in order to discern their meaning, implications and thus their relevance for the Gállok case. The study is approached from a pre-theoretical commitment to decolonisation, therefore applying a decolonial lens to both the research problem and the analysis.¹⁰

The theoretical contemplations will be verified against primary data collected through social media research and during a ten-day field trip undertaken to Jokkmokk in February 2022. The different data sets are composed of primary and secondary data, with the primary data consisting of social media interactions from activists in Jokkmokk, public statements and

¹⁰ H. Moore, 'Global Anxieties', *Anthropological Theory*, 4/1 (2016), 71-88.

documents from the Sámi Parliament and interviews. Since the proposal of the mine in 2006, a thriving online activism has taken place, connecting and mobilising different stakeholders in the area. The Facebook group “Gruvfritt Jokkmokk” as well as the corresponding Instagram Page are places of vivid exchange, debate and protest. One example is the 30-day initiative named “DÁT LA GÁLLOK - THIS IS GÁLLOK - DET HÄR ÄR GÁLLOK”, in the realm of which a series of photos depict the multiple facets of Gállok, the site of the from the lens of the local people. These data prove to be highly insightful to get a grasp of some of the ontological conflicts at stake. The secondary data consists of the ethnographically inspired field observations from Jokkmokk. The author uses “ethnographically inspired” because the intention of the field trip was to experiment with ethnography and to add an ethnographic component to the analysis. It does not include the element of “deep hanging out” that is key to ethnographic work.¹¹ This, however, leaves opportunity for a future extension of this study. Nevertheless, these data sets will enlighten the theory and are bound to bring elements of lived experience of Sámi people to some of the truisms that might underlie human rights, extractivism and Rights of Nature. This requires a note on representativeness. Despite a generally acknowledged sense of unity, there is significant diversity of thought, ontology, even identity within the Sámi community.¹² While the data will inevitably generate some insight, any conclusions drawn from these interactions can only be applied proportionately to the sample size.

1.2 Relevance and Contribution

How the rights of humans can be secured on a planet that is increasingly harmed by humans is one of the most pressing questions of the 21st century.¹³ The more the climate crisis merges into a human rights crisis, the less the warning signs — forest fires, the shrinking of the Amazon, drought, the melting of the Arctic ice, just to name a few — can be ignored in human rights debates. While indigenous peoples inhabit a mere 25 percent of the Earth’s surface, they safeguard 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity.¹⁴ At the same time,

¹¹ C. Geertz, *Deep Hanging Out.*, 16 vols. (The New York Review of Books, 45; New York, 1998).

¹² G. Kuhn, *Liberating Sápmi: Indigenous Resistance in Europe’s Far North* (Oakland: PM Press, 2020).

¹³ Viaene, 2022.

¹⁴ The World Bank, 'Indigenous Peoples', <https://www-worldbank-org.translate.google/en/topic/indigenouspeoples?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=de&_x_tr_hl=de&_x_tr_pto=op,sc>, accessed March 7th 2022.

indigenous peoples worldwide are among the most affected communities by extractivism.¹⁵ Against this backdrop, Naomi Klein criticises contemporary societies for being inherently extractive.¹⁶

The status quo is begging for radical change, which some suggest RoN will bring. Considering the implementation gap of indigenous human rights principles, “it seems critical to explore how the RoN could enhance the implementation of Indigenous rights”¹⁷. By endorsing the UDRME, the Sámi Parliament in Sweden has decided to partake in the RoN movement. This momentum remains close to unresearched. Despite active efforts to bring forward an EU-wide Rights of Nature framework, the adoption of the UDRME by the Sámi Parliament has gained little attention.¹⁸ What this study contributes to the field is first their interconnectedness from a decolonial perspective and second an application to the Sámi context in Sweden.

The relevance of the local example is further underscored by a general lack of debate on the Sweden-Sápmi relations in Nordic human rights scholarship. In its 2021 Voluntary National Review, Sweden commits to a human rights-based approach to sustainability that leaves no one behind and aims at a whole-of-society-approach which holds accountable the public as well as the private sector.¹⁹ In stark contrast to this, Sweden and Finland, contrary to their Nordic neighbour Norway, are yet to sign the International Labour Organization Convention 169 (ILO169), one of the two most important international instruments for the collective rights of indigenous peoples. Sweden *has* adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (hereafter, UNDRIP), however unlike the ILO169 it constitutes a resolution that is not legally binding.²⁰ This is symptomatic of a certain Nordic human rights inconsistency: while presenting themselves internationally as vanguards of

¹⁵ Viaene, 2022.

¹⁶ N. Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).

¹⁷ J. Gilbert, 'The Rights of Nature, Indigenous Peoples and International Human Rights Law: From Dichotomies to Synergies', *To be published in the Journal of Human Rights and the Environment – Sept. 2022*, p. 14.

¹⁸ J. Darpö, 'Can Nature Get It Right? A Study on Rights of Nature in the European Context', (73: European Parliament 2021).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ S. Mikaelsson, 'Winds of Change. The Role and Potential of Sámi Parliamentarians', in May-Britt Öhman and Hiroshi Maruyama Johan Gärdebo (ed.), *RE: Mindings Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges* (55; Uppsala: Uppsala Multiethnic Papers, 2014), 79-87; C.-G. Ojala and J. M. Nordin, 'Colonial Histories, Sámi Archaeology, and the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Northern Sweden', *Arctic Anthropology*, 52/2 (2015), 6-21.

human rights issues, decades-old conventions that would bind them to human rights standards on their own soil are not ratified.²¹ The short field trip conducted for this thesis was enough to feel the omnipresence of the unfulfilled claim, the gap in the Swedish human rights landscape: in Umeå, tags decorate the walls saying “ILO169” along with the initialism “ČSV”²² and next to the Ájtte museum in Jokkmokk there is a pole demonstratively listing all the countries that did sign the convention – with Sweden missing (Fieldnotes, p. 1&3). Chapter 2 will proceed by placing the study into its geographical and political context. It follows an in-depth literature review in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 introduces the theoretical toolkit, followed by Chapter 5 presenting empirical data, methods, ethics and positionality. Chapter 6 and 7 analyse and discuss the data against the backdrop of the theory.

2 Place and Context

2.1 On Sápmi and Gállok

*“All of this is my home
these fjords rivers lakes
the cold the sunlight the storms
The night and day of the fjelds
happiness and sorrow
sisters and brothers
All of this is my home
and I carry it in my heart”²³*

Sápmi is the traditional territory of the Sámi people, whose connection to their land is illustrated by Sámi poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää in the poem above. It spreads across the

²¹ H. Gaski, 'The Sami People: The "White Indians" of Scandinavia', *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 17/1 (1993), 115-28; M. Naum & J. M. Nordin, *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity. Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*. (Heidelberg: Springer Science+Business Media, 2013); S. Mikaelsson, 'Winds of Change. The Role and Potential of Sámi Parliamentarians', in May-Britt Öhman and Hiroshi Maruyama Johan Gärdebo (ed.), *RE: Mindings Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges* (55; Uppsala: Uppsala Multiethnic Papers, 2014), 79-87; C.-G. Ojala, 'Mines and Missions: Early Modern Swedish Colonialism in Sápmi and Its Legacies Today', *Vertaisarvioitu Kollegialt Granskad*, (2020), 160-76; Å. Össbo, 'Hydropower Company Sites: A Study of Swedish Settler Colonialism', *Settler Colonial Studies*, (2022), 1-18.

²² The three letters ČSV are symbolic of Sámi resistance and activism.

²³ N.-A. Valkeapää, *Trekways of the Wind* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

northern part of the Scandinavian peninsula in Norway and Sweden to Finland and the Russian Kola peninsula. According to estimations, the Sámi population consists of around 50.000 to 100.000, around 20.000 of which live in Sweden.²⁴

Gállok is located in the municipality of Jokkmokk, on an island in the Lule River in the province of Norrbotten, several kilometres north of the Arctic Circle. The area forms part of the ancestral land of the Sámi people, to whom Gállok constitutes hunting and fishing grounds as well as reindeer winter grazing land. As the map (Figure 1) indicates, rivers, lakes and mountains shape the area around Jokkmokk and several national parks are in its direct proximity. In the wintertime, these are entirely covered by snow.

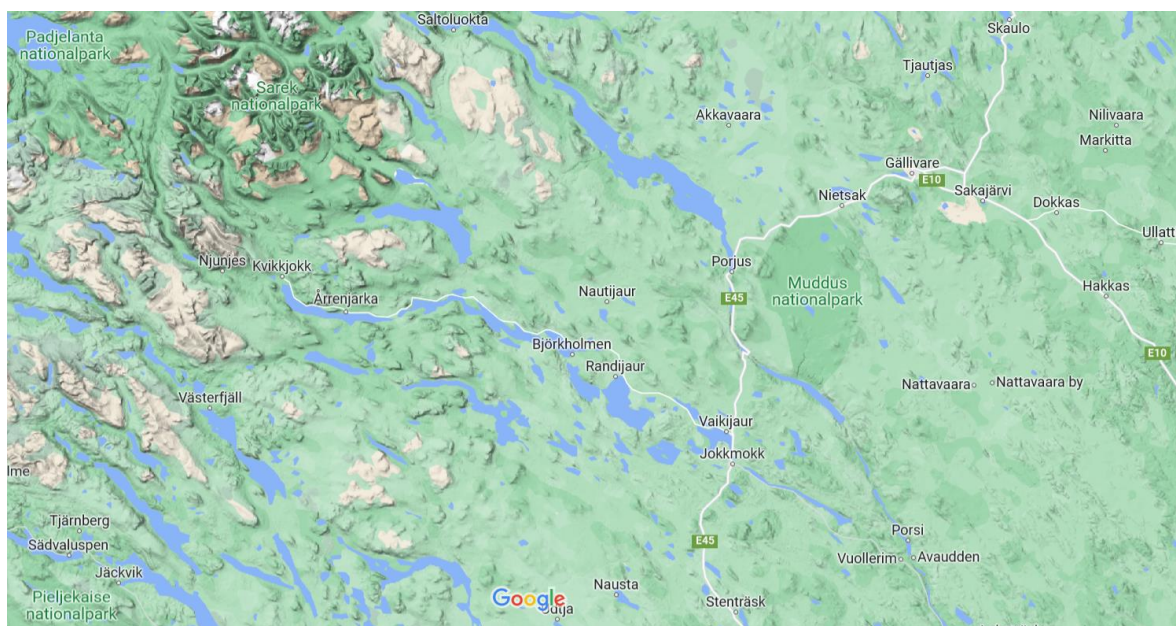


Figure 1: Map depicting the topography and villages in and around Jokkmokk. Gállok is located between Björkholmen and Randijaur (Source: Google Maps).

The struggle around the Gállok mine mostly manifests itself in Jokkmokk, a municipality of around 3000 inhabitants. Jáhkâmáhkke, the Lule-Sámi name of the place translates to the “river’s curve”. As the activists, Sámi and non-Sámi, predominantly use the Swedish spelling, this study follows this practice. It is a place that experiences subarctic climate, with temperatures as low as 40 degrees below zero. It is considered the cultural centre of Sámi people in Sweden, being home to the Ájtte museum for Sámi culture and the mountain

²⁴ D. Mamo, *International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, The Indigenous World 2021* (Copenhagen: Eks-Skolen Trykkeri, 2021).

region. Further, it hosts the nationwide Sámi youth organisation *Sáminuorra*, a branch of the Sámi Parliament and a Sámi Library.

The society in Jokkmokk is deeply embedded with reindeer herding, as a cultural and economic practice.²⁵ Throughout the 20th century, the river Lule, at the bend of which Jokkmokk is located, has been subject to numerous hydro-extractivist projects, which have included its straightening, regulating and the damming of all its waterfalls for the Swedish production of electricity.²⁶ These hydroelectric interventions have had significant effects on the quality of life along the river, which used to be a place not only for fishing but also for recreation. Jokkmokk is also known for its annual Winter Market, which has taken place in the municipality since the 17th century. Originally established by the Crown as a means to collect taxes from the local population, it is nowadays as much an event of Sámi pride as of tourism.²⁷

In 2006, the British private-equity firm Beowulf Mining Plc. was granted the permission to explore the area around Gállok with the prospect of drilling for iron ore²⁸, which was eventually conducted between 2010 and 2014. In reaction, local people began to mobilise through the Facebook network *No mines in Jokkmokk!*. In the years that followed, the Jokkmokk Winter Market has become a site of political activism, using the attention in order to express the local population's dissatisfaction with the mining plans of the company Beowulf. The following maps (Figure 2 and 3) show Gállok's location in Sweden as well as a close-up of the areas that have been subject to test drilling by Jokkmokk Iron Mines AB, for copper as well as iron ore.

²⁵ Persson, Harnesk and Islar, 2017.

²⁶ Tuorda, 2014.

²⁷ S. Abram, 'Jokkmokk: Rapacity and Resistance in Sápmi', *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North* (2016), 67-92; Jåhkåmåhke Márnána, 'The History of the Market', <<https://jokkmokksmarknad.se/en/the-history/>>.

²⁸ Tuorda, 2014.

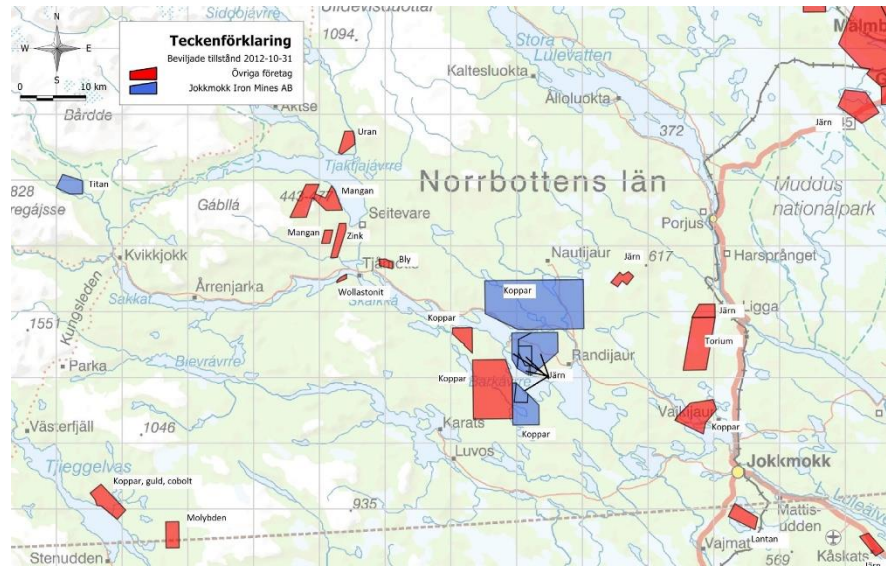


Figure 2: Map showing the location of the contested Gállok site in Sweden (Source: Swedish Geological Survey).

Figure 3: Map showing sites of test drilling in Gállok (Source: Jokkmokk Iron Mines AB).

During the conduction of fieldwork, the people in Jokkmokk were waiting for a decision from the Swedish government on the Gállok mine. A five-year wait was about to come to an end in March 2022, in the anticipation of which over 70.000 signatures against the mine had been signed and handed over to the government. A few weeks later, the government gave the green light to the Swedish-registered mining company Jokkmokk Iron Mines (owned by Beowulf) for a processing concession. This allows the company to further investigate the economic and environmental implications of a mine. With the environmental process likely to take a long time, the decision at this stage is mostly a political symbol – yet, it is emblematic of the power-dynamics between mine-opponents and the Swedish government.²⁹

2.2 The Sámi Parliament and the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth

In the Nordic countries, the Sámi people are politically represented by three respective Sámi Parliaments. The three Parliaments conjointly form the Sámi Parliamentary Council.³⁰ In Sweden, the Sámi Parliament was established in 1993 with the intention to recognise the

²⁹ J. Holgersson, 'Här Är Stegen Till Gruvbrytning I Gállok', *SVT Nyheter*, 2022.

³⁰ Mamo, 2021.

Sámi as an indigenous people and to ensure their participation in the majority democracy system of Swedish national politics.³¹ It consists of 31 members, elected every four years and its function is to monitor issues regarding Sámi culture in Sweden. In a periodic report of Sweden on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), the Human Rights Committee expressed concerns about the limited resources allocated to the Sámi Parliament and the flawed consultation with Sámi Parliament representatives in regards to extraction and development projects.³²

In 2014, the Sámi Parliament published its disapproval of the administration of extractivist projects in the report *Minerals and Mines in Sápmi*. In order to enable a “viable Sápmi rooted in a sound nature and a living Sami culture”, the Sámi Parliament exclaims that no additional large-scale exploitation ought to take place in Sápmi.³³ Among the respect for the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and for the ratification of the ILO169, the report urges to amend the Swedish Minerals Act, suggesting that exploitation concessions should only be granted after consensus from the Sámi Parliament.

In 2018, the Sámi Parliament endorsed the UDRME. According to Marie Persson Njajta from the Sámi parliament, the adoption of the UDRME represents a “paradigm shift (...) towards a view where humans understand ourselves as part of nature” and is considered an answer to a “colonial perspective, exploitation, and climate change”³⁴.

The UDRME was proposed in Bolivia at the *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*. It was endorsed by representatives of 130 nations who called on the General Assembly of the United Nations to adopt it. The declaration is modelled on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating in its preamble that “the peoples and nations of Earth” are

“recognizing that the capitalist system and all forms of depredation, exploitation, abuse and contamination have caused great destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother

³¹ Sametinget, 'The Sami Parliament. Background: The State and the Sami Parliament', (updated 2019-03-14) <<https://www.sametinget.se/9688>>, accessed May 3rd 2022.

³² IWGIA, 'Challenges of the Sami', <<https://iwgia.org/en/sapmi.html?highlight=WyJzYW1pIiwicGFybGlhbWVudCIsInBhcmxpYW1lbnQncyIsInBhcmxpYW1lbnQnLiIsInNhbWkgeGFybGlhbWVudCJd>>, accessed February 3rd 2022.

³³ Sametinget, 'Minerals and Mines in Sápmi. The Viewpoint of the Swedish Sami Parliament', (Åre: Swedish Sami Parliament 2014).

³⁴ P. Thiel, 'Time for a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Nature', <<https://medium.com/@pella.thiel/time-for-a-universal-declaration-on-the-rights-of-nature-ad97263a39f4>>, accessed January 5th 2022.

*Earth, putting life as we know it today at risk through phenomena such as climate change*³⁵

And that

*“(…) in an interdependent living community it is not possible to recognize the rights of only human beings without causing an imbalance within Mother Earth”*³⁶

Among the inherent rights of “Mother Earth” are henceforth the right to life and to exist (Art. 2.1(a)) and the right to integral health (Art. 2.1(g)).

3 Literature Review and Context of the Study

The relevant literature for this thesis ranges from political theory and philosophy to legal theory and anthropology. This chapter first reviews the existing literature on human rights, RoN and extractivism and then situates it in the context of Sweden and Sápmi.

3.1 Reviewing Extractivism, Human Rights and RoN

With regards to the scope of this thesis, it is worth acknowledging that the attempt to do justice to the vast amount of literature on extractivism, human rights and RoN is inherently subject to the risk of omitting some of the remarkable work out there to a certain extent. With the focus of this thesis in mind, this literature review concentrates on work where the relevant concepts overlap, considering them not in isolation but in relation to each other.

3.1.1 About Extractivism

Extractivism is a framework used to refer to the large-scale removal of raw materials.³⁷ An extensive discourse emerged from Latin American political economy and political ecology at the beginning of this century.³⁸ Alberto Acosta defines extractivism as “those activities

³⁵ Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth 2010 (UDRME)

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ G. Lagos H. Blanco; V. Torres, 'La Minería Y El Desarrollo Sustentable En Chile. ¿Qué Piensan Los Diversos Actores?', *Ambiente y Desarrollo*, 17/4 (2001), 1-17; A. Acosta, 'Extractivism and Neoextractivism: Two Sides of the Same Curse', *Beyond development: alternative visions from Latin America*, 1 (2013), 61-8; A. Willow, 'Indigenous Extractivism in Boreal Canada: Colonial Legacies, Contemporary Struggles and Sovereign Futures', *Humanities*, 5/3 (2016).

³⁸ B. Bustos; C. Echavarría; A. Acosta, J. Schuldt, A. Barandiarán, A. Bebbington, M. Folchi and A. Alayza CEDLA – Bolivia, E. Gudynas, 'Extractivismo, Política Y Sociedad', in Centro Andino De Acción Popular (Caap); Centro Latinoamericano De Ecología Social (Claes) (ed.), (Cuadernos de Capacitación; Quito:

which remove large quantities of natural resources that are not processed (or processed only to a limited degree), especially for export”. Extractivism manifests itself not only in mining, oil and gas production, but equally in fishing, farming, large-scale hydro-electric development projects and clearcut logging.³⁹ As a “mode of accumulation”, extractivism has been part and parcel of conquest and colonisation for about 500 years.⁴⁰ Being a byproduct of colonisation, it has built on the looting of resources in order to nourish the demands of a distant elite. Analogously, extractivist practices tend to be driven by the demand of the “metropolitan centres of nascent capitalism”⁴¹ and are contingent on a hegemonic logic of extracting from one geographical location (the assumed “periphery”) to another (the assumed “centre”).⁴²

A newer strand of extractivism is pursued including by progressive governments under the premise of development and social welfare through the redistribution of revenues from extractivism.⁴³ This so-called neoextractivism enjoys a higher level of social legitimisation across a broad spectrum of society. State-led extractivism shifts the control over natural resources from transnational companies to the state. From a social justice perspective, this enables higher levels of social welfare and redistribution. However, with the rules of operation staying the same — competitiveness with the international market, efficiency and the maximisation of profits — neoextractivism is no less detrimental to the wellbeing of humans and the environment.⁴⁴

In the 2010s, numerous other scholars — Gudynas, Svampa, Schuldt, Bebbington just to name a few⁴⁵ — have argued that social and economical development through extractivist revenues is. This framing is particularly useful for the Latin American context, but certain

Albazul Offset, 2009); Eduardo Gudynas, 'Agropecuaria Y Nuevo Extractivismo Bajo Los Gobiernos Progresistas De América Del Sur', *Revista Territorios* 5 (2010), 37-54; Acosta, 2013; I. Wenzel, J. Szeman, 'What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Extractivism?', *Textual Practice*, 35/3 (2021), 505-23; Viaene, 'Can Rights of Nature Save Us from the Anthropocene Catastrophe?', 2022.

³⁹ Acosta, 2013; Willow, 2016.

⁴⁰ Acosta, 2013; C. G. Gonzalez, 'Bridging the North-South Divide: International Environmental Law in the Anthropocene', *Pace Environmental Law Review*, 32/2 (2015), 407-33.

⁴¹ Acosta, 2013.

⁴² *Ibid.*; Gonzalez, 2015; Wenzel and Szeman, 2021.

⁴³ E. Gudynas, 'Diez Tesis Urgentes Sobre El Nuevo Extractivismo. Contextos Y Demandas Bajo El Progresismo Sudamericano Actual', in Centro Andino De Acción Popular; Latinoamericano De Ecología Social (ed.), *Extractivismo, Política Y Sociedad* (Quito: Albazul Offset, 2009), 187-225; Acosta, 2013.

⁴⁴ Gudynas, 2009; Acosta, 2013.

⁴⁵ Acosta et al., 2009; M. Svampa, 'Resource Extractivism and Alternatives: Latin American Perspectives on Development', *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik*, 28/3 (2012), 43-73.

parallels can be drawn to the Global North, although undoubtedly the horrors of colonialism and its remains are incomparable.

What is currently coming to light in Europe is another intrinsic paradox of extractivism: the vision of mining as part of the response to the climate crisis. In the European Union, the extraction of ‘climate neutral steel’ is justified under the premise of reducing Co² emissions⁴⁶. Swedish actors are leading the way in the production of this so-called ‘green steel’, appealing to the natural resources under the ground in Sápmi.⁴⁷

Imre Szeman and Jennifer Wenzel assess the framework of extractivism against its value for humanities scholarship. They urge for a definitional rigour that ensures to demonstrate the ground-flattening consequences extractivism entails rather than using it as a metaphor for any kind of extracting.⁴⁸ Along the lines of that, it is important to ask what extractivism means and to whom.

For this, this thesis further draws on some of the many insights from the field of political ontology in order to add a layer of the ontology of place and rights (of humans/nature) to the debate on extractivism in Sápmi. Political ontology is a frame of reference that considers “conflicts involving different assumptions about ‘what exists’” as a “politicoconceptual problem”⁴⁹, thus questioning dominant historiographies of progress, modernity and the notion of one single truth/reality.⁵⁰ The assumption of modernity that dichotomises the human and the non-human, culture and nature is bottom-line not only of Euro-American thinking including the discipline of human rights, but also of extractivist capitalism itself.⁵¹ Unlearning these assumptions takes more than a thesis on the topic. The field of ontology is much vaster than it can be done justice to in the scope of this project. However, the spirit and the underlying *raison d’être* of this study is to take into consideration the importance of

⁴⁶ Vogl, Åhman and Nilsson, 2020.

⁴⁷ H2 Green Steel, 'Powering a New, Clean Industrial Revolution', <<https://www.h2greensteel.com/>>, accessed April 28th 2022; LKAB, 'Our Transformation', <<https://lkab.com/en/what-we-do/our-transformation/>>, accessed 28.5. 2022.

⁴⁸ Vogl, Åhman and Nilsson, 2020.

⁴⁹ M. Blaser, 'Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in Spite of Europe', *Current Anthropology*, 54/5 (2013), 547-68, p. 547.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 2012); J. J. Rivera Andía and C. Vindal Ødegaard, 'Introduction: Indigenous Peoples, Extractivism, and Turbulences in South America', *Indigenous Life Projects and Extractivism* (2019), 1-50.

ontology to the debate on human rights and extractivism, as it has been pointed out by several scholars who engage in the “turn to ontology”⁵².

Mario Blaser explores how such ontological conflicts are manifested in the context of indigenous peoples in Latin America, encouraging other scholars to do the same in different parts of the world.⁵³ Marisol de la Cadena has undertaken long-term ethnographic work in order to shed light on the overlapping and frontier of indigenous and non-indigenous worlds, inviting us to rethink the relationship between humans and the material world.⁵⁴

Arturo Escobar studies examples of indigenous reactions to extractive mining, finding that extractivism leads to the ontological occupation of the land. He uses the concept of One-World-World to challenge the notion of there being one reality, a reality in which nature cannot exist as such. His work hence questions the unanimous understanding that everything that exists in ‘nature’ can be turned into ‘resource’.⁵⁵

Maria Ehrnström-Fuentes applies a political ontology framework to the conflict between extractive forestry and small-scale farmers in rural Uruguay, contending that a place-based identity is constructed in order to counter the presence of extractive industries on their lands.⁵⁶

Based on her ethnographic work in Maya Q’eqchi’ territory in Guatemala, Lieselotte Viaene calls for an “urgent need to reconceptualize human rights with ontologically different ways of understanding and relating to human-water-life through bottom-up co-theorizing in order to pave the way for human rights beyond the human”⁵⁷. This turns extractivist development sites into opportunities for political and legal exchange.⁵⁸

For the purpose of this study, the field of political ontology is particularly interesting diversify the stories told about extractivist projects. It is important to not take for granted

⁵² Blaser, 2013; Rivera Andía and Vindal Ødegaard, 2019, p. 3; M. de La Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham, USA: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁵³ Blaser, 2013.

⁵⁴ De La Cadena, 2015.

⁵⁵ A. Escobar, 'Thinking-Feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South', *AIBR, Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 11/1 (2016), 11-32.

⁵⁶ M. Ehrnström-Fuentes, 'Confronting Extractivism – the Role of Local Struggles in the (Un)Making of Place', *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 18/1 (2019), 50-73.

⁵⁷ L. Viaene, 'Indigenous Water Ontologies, Hydro-Development and the Human/More-Than-Human Right to Water: A Call for Critical Engagement with Plurilegal Water Realities', *Water*, 13/12 (2021); p. 2.

⁵⁸ Z. Todd, 'An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: “Ontology” Is Just Another Word for Colonialism', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29 (2016), 4–22; Viaene, 2021.

certain aspects of extractivism such as the ontological status of a resource and what the meaning of extractivism is to the human and the earth.

3.1.2 About Human Rights

In human rights research on environmental questions, the common line of argument is that the environment can and should be protected by virtue of the human right *to* a healthy environment.⁵⁹ Along this logic, some argue that it is best to strengthen the environmental dimensions of already existing human rights, whereas others have supported the enactment of a new human right to the environment.⁶⁰ This gaze on the environment from a human rights perspective, however, tends to disregard several aspects. Firstly, it does not take into consideration that the interests of humans might be in tension with the interests of nature. Secondly, it continues to treat nature as a resource, available for human consumption.⁶¹ Contending that the human right *to* a healthy environment is not sufficient to counter the ecological crisis, some international law scholars are turning towards ecological law in order to rethink human-nature relationships.⁶² This approach however, has paid “little or no attention to the continuation of [the] political and legal subordination of indigenous peoples”.⁶³ Thus, a human rights lens requires the inclusion of the collective human rights of indigenous peoples into the debates on human rights, RoN and extractivism.

Against the backdrop of these dynamics, a discourse has emerged on human- and beyond-the-human-rights. As a result, a myriad of contributions have been made that diversify the relations between human rights and the environment. Similarly to the scholarship on extractivism, a vast amount of the academic literature that analyses human rights issues at the crossroads with extractivism and Rights of Nature focuses on the Latin American context.⁶⁴ Although the discourse on the subject of human rights is by no means new, over

⁵⁹ M. Thorne, 'Establishing Environment as a Human Right', *Denver Journal International Law & Policy*, 19 (1990), 301-42; J. W. Nickel, 'The Human Right to a Safe Environment: Philosophical Perspectives on Its Scope and Justification', *Yale Journal of International Law*, 18 (1993), 281-96; B. H. Weston and D. Bollier, 'Toward a Recalibrated Human Right to a Clean and Healthy Environment: Making the Conceptual Transition', *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* 4/2 (2013), 116-42.

⁶⁰ Thorne, 1990; Weston and Bollier, 2013; B. Lewis, *Environmental Humanrights and Climate Change. Current Status and Future Prospects*. (Singapore: Springer, 2018).

⁶¹ Viaene, 2022.

⁶² *Ibid*; P. D. Burdon, K. Anker, G. Garver, M. Maloney and C. Sbert, *From Environmental to Ecological Law* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

⁶³ Viaene, 2022.

⁶⁴ L. Etchart, *Global Governance of the Environment, Indigenous Peoples and the Rights of Nature. Extractive Industries in the Ecuadorian Amazon*, ed. César Villanueva Rivas Rebecka Villanueva Ulfgard

the past decades there has been an increasing amount of literature on the topics of human rights, RoN and extractivism.⁶⁵

Malayna Raftopoulos analyses the connection between human rights violations and extractivism in Latin America. She concludes that in practice, the human rights discourse has generated only limited results “because the state as a guardian of human rights remains fragile in Latin America and is willing to override their commitment to human and environmental rights in the pursuit of development”⁶⁶.

Jérémie Gilbert stresses the importance of self-determination of indigenous peoples alongside their right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), both recognised as key human rights of indigenous peoples under international law.⁶⁷ He demonstrates that the right to self-determination counteracts the essentialisation of indigenous culture and nature ontologies, as it avoids the notion of “frozen rights” which are conditioned by what the Western gaze considers as “authentic” or “traditional”.⁶⁸ This is an aspect that tends to be overseen in the frenzy of the RoN movement.⁶⁹

The importance of self-determination of indigenous peoples leads to another relevant aspect of human rights in the light of extractivism, namely their relationship with colonialism. Rajagopal⁷⁰ observes that most historiographies of human rights are either indifferent or ignorant to this relationship, even though they are in fact “far from being untainted by colonialism”⁷¹. This manifests itself on multiple levels. Some mild critiques reprimand the human rights discourse for reproducing a notion of Western superiority and creating

(Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); M. Raftopoulos, 'Contemporary Debates on Social-Environmental Conflicts, Extractivism and Human Rights in Latin America', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21/4 (2017), 387-404; P. Garzón López, 'Pluralismo Jurídico, Derecho Indígena Y Colonialidad Jurídica: Repensando El Derecho Desde La Colonialidad Del Poder', *Ius Inkarri. Revista de la Facultad de Derecho y Ciencia Política*, 8 (2019), 215-26; C. Valladares and R. Boelens, 'Extractivism and the Rights of Nature: Governmentality, 'Convenient Communities' and Epistemic Pacts in Ecuador', *Environmental Politics*, 26/6 (2017), 1015-34; Viaene, 2022.

⁶⁵ J. Donnelly, 'Third Generations Rights', in C. Brölman et al. (ed.), *Peoples and Minority in International Law* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 119-50; M. Freeman, 'Are There Collective Human Rights?', *Political Studies* XLII (1995), 25-40; A. Lefebvre & D. Celermajer, *The Subject of Human Rights* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020).

⁶⁶ Raftopoulos, 2017.

⁶⁷ Gilbert, *To be published Sept. 2022*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ B. Rajagopal, *International Law from Below. Development, Social Movements, and Third World Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

dichotomies of savages and saviours.⁷² In the context of extractivism, this is exhibited in the asynchrony at which human rights and environmental obligations are imposed on Global South governments, but not on foreign investors (often granted unlimited access to natural resources notwithstanding human rights abuses).⁷³ Other critics consider human rights even more inextricably linked to colonialism, suggesting that human rights can and have been used as a tool for the project of colonialism itself as much as they can be utilised as a tool of resistance against the (colonial) abuse of power.⁷⁴ Chapter 3.2 examines how this observation can be applied to the Sámi peoples' struggle against extractivism.⁷⁵

3.1.3 About Rights of Nature (RoN)

In the geological era of the “Anthropocene”, marked by the human-made layer of crust that will constitute the outer crust of the Earth, human rights scholarship brings challenges and responsibilities of a novel kind.⁷⁶ The last decade has seen a resurgence of debates around granting nature rights, from scholars and activists alike.⁷⁷ Yet, the idea of nature having legal standing is not an idea of the 21st century.

Also referred to as Earth rights, the concept of Rights of Nature means acknowledging that natural entities have certain inherent rights. Thus, they can stand in court as a legal person, being legally represented.⁷⁸ It seeks to break with the prevailing conception that nature is a mere resource or property, available to humans for its exploitation. Furthermore, Rights of Nature theory proclaims a wholistic conception of nature, regarding all beings as interrelated and interdependent.

⁷² *Ibid*; for an extended debate see M. Mutua, 'Savages, Victims, and Savior: The Metaphor of Human Rights', *Harvard International Law Journal*, 42/1 (2001), 201-46.; see also S. J. Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism. A Transnational Feminist Ethic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁷³ Gonzalez, 2015.

⁷⁴ S. Shetty, 'Decolonising Human Rights', <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/decolonizing-human-rights-salil-shetty/>> (2018), accessed February 24th 2022; J.-M Barreto, 'Decolonial Thinking and the Quest for Decolonising Human Rights', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 46/4-5 (2018), 484-502.

⁷⁵ Ojala and Nordin, 2015; Persson, Harnesk, and Islar, 2017.

⁷⁶ Tănăsescu, 2022.

⁷⁷ L. Charpleix, 'The Whanganui River as Te Awa Tupua: Place-Based Law in a Legally Pluralistic Society', *The Geographical Journal*, 184/1 (2018), 19-30; L. C. Pecharroman, 'Rights of Nature: Rivers That Can Stand in Court', *Resources*, 7/1 (2018); D. R. Boyd, 'Recognizing the Rights of Nature: Lofty Rhetoric or Legal Revolution?', *Natural Resources & Environment*, 32/4 (2018), 13-17; C. M. Kauffman and P. L. Martin, 'Constructing Rights of Nature Norms in the Us, Ecuador, and New Zealand', *Global Environmental Politics*, 18/4 (2018), 43-62; E. Macpherson, 'The (Human) Rights of Nature. A Comparative Study of Emerging Legal Rights for Rivers and Lakes in the United States of America and Mexico', *Duke Environmental Law & Policy Forum*, XXXI (2021), 327-77; Raftopoulos, 2017.

⁷⁸ Charpleix, 2018; Boyd, 2018.

The evolution of the Rights of Nature movement can be told in many different ways, but is a Euro-American philosophical idea at its core⁷⁹, with its origin typically demarcated by Christopher Stone's 1972 essay *Should Trees have Standing?*⁸⁰ Stone argues that there is no legal barrier to attributing legal personhood to nature given that the same has long been made possible for corporations or other rights subjects that cannot speak for themselves. Stone thus suggests creating a system of guardianship to speak on behalf of the river, forest, ocean.⁸¹ In *The Great Work*, Thomas Berry builds on this idea by proposing a model of interdependency of all beings from a Christian theological point of view.⁸² Some of Berry's ideas were later taken up by Cormac Cullinan in *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice*.⁸³ Both of them add a moral component to the RoN argument: not only *can* nature have legal standing, but it also *ought* to have legal standing.

Almost 50 years on from Stone's suggestion, new laws are produced on the domestic and the international level.⁸⁴ In 2010, these legal initiatives, paired with the aforementioned scholarly discourse, culminated in the UDRME.

On a national level, Rights of Nature have made it into the laws of multiple countries, including Ecuador, Bolivia, New Zealand, Colombia, India, Australia, Bangladesh, Uganda and Mexico.⁸⁵ In 2008, the Ecuadorian plurinational constitution was revised in 2008 to include the notion of Pacha Mama⁸⁶. Since then, several cases were successfully brought to court on behalf of natural entities, the most prominent example being the Vilcabamba River, whose rights were acknowledged by the court.⁸⁷ In New Zealand, two ecosystems, the Te Urewera National Park (*Te Urewera Act 2014*) and the Whanganui River (*Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017*), have been granted legal personhood, following a centuries-long conflict between the British and the Maori legal systems.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ Viaene, 2022; Gilbert, *To be published. Sept. 2022*.

⁸⁰ C. D. Stone, *Should Trees Have Standing? Law, Morality, and the Environment* (3 edn.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸¹ Stone, 2010.

⁸² T. Berry, *The Great Work. Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

⁸³ C. Cullinan, *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice* (Cape Town: Siber Ink, 2011).

⁸⁴ Viaene, 2022.

⁸⁵ Boyd, 2018; Gilbert, *To be published. Sept. 2022*; Tănăsescu, 2022.

⁸⁶ Ecuador Const. preamble, 2008: "Celebrando a la naturaleza, la *Pacha Mama*, de la que somos parte y que es vital para nuestra existencia" and "Decidimos construir una nueva forma de convivencia ciudadana, en diversidad y armonía con la naturaleza, para alcanzar el buen vivir, el sumak kawsay; Una sociedad que respeta, en todas sus dimensiones, la dignidad de las personas y las colectividades" (emphasis S.T.); *Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador 2008* (Constit.) s. 1

⁸⁷ Boyd, 2018.

⁸⁸ Charpleix, 2018.

Human guardians were appointed to represent the interests of these natural entities that encompass forests, mountains and lakes. In 2016, the Constitutional Court of Colombia granted the Río Atrato legal personhood in response to illegal mining activities and deforestation. Two representative guardians were appointed to speak on behalf of the river.⁸⁹ Shortly after, two rivers were granted legal personhood in India; in 2017, the High Court of Uttarakhand decided that “Rivers Ganga and Yamuna, all their tributaries, streams, every natural water flowing with flow continuously or intermittently of these rivers, are declared as entities having the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living”⁹⁰.

The RoN debate generates certain challenges that are worth shedding more light on. The prevailing showpiece of the current Rights of Nature movement is its asserted grounding in indigenous ontologies.⁹¹ Many of the renowned Rights of Nature platforms present their movement as inherently rooted in indigenous belief systems and unequivocally contributing to decolonisation.⁹² It is common practice among most RoN advocates to defend them as an intrinsic good, able to revolutionise environmental law and “save the world”.⁹³ It would not be fair of Western scholars and activists to claim originality to the idea of regarding nature as a being that can and should have rights. Indigenous peoples across the world understand nature as a living being.⁹⁴ However, the caveat is that an unreflected boarding of the “RoN-train” can also cause more damage than it does good. “Grounded in reflections derived from collaborative and long-term ethnographic research among indigenous peoples”⁹⁵, Viaene reveals some blind spots of the RoN. As there is no indigenous philosophy itself that includes RoN, claiming that RoN has derived from indigenous cosmologies contains the risk of essentialising indigenous knowledge.⁹⁶ In a similar vein, Gilbert warns that “the

⁸⁹ Pecharroman, 2018.

⁹⁰ *Mohd v State of Uttarakhand and Others* (2017) PIL 1262014

⁹¹ GARN (Global Alliance for the Rights Of Nature), 'Who We Are: Our Fundamental Principles', <<https://www.garn.org/about-garn/>>, accessed April 2nd 2022; Pecharroman, 2018; David R. Boyd, *The Rights of Nature: A Legal Revolution That Could Save the World* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2017).

⁹² GARN, 2022; Celdf (the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund), 'About CELDF', <<https://celdf.org/about-celdf/>>, accessed March 28th 2022; Earth Law Centre (ELC), 'We Envision a Future in Which Humans and Nature Flourish Together', <<https://www.earthlawcenter.org/>>, accessed April 1st 2022.

⁹³ D. R. Boyd, *The Rights of Nature: A Legal Revolution That Could Save the World* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2017), p. 1.

⁹⁴ De La Cadena, 2015.

⁹⁵ Viaene, 2022.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*; G. C. Spivak, *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998).

development of the RoN can only be properly achieved together with Indigenous peoples, in full recognition of their rights”⁹⁷, arguing that RoN can and should not replace indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination. As demonstrated above, it is Western philosophy that has mainly brought forward the concept of RoN. More so, its moral basis has been set by “secular rationalists and conservative Christians”⁹⁸. This makes the fear that RoN could undermine indigenous peoples’ rights a reasonable concern.⁹⁹

In order to avoid the risk of appropriation of indigenous knowledge and the overriding of their concerns, Viaene highlights the need to keep the RoN debate rooted in discourse between scholars and local protagonists.

3.2 Human Rights, RoN and Extractivism in Sápmi

Chapter 3.1 has shown that a majority of the literature on human rights, RoN and extractivism has focused on Latin America, or other parts of the Global South. Yet, some observations of the scholarship reviewed above are shared with the research generated on Sápmi.

On the Swedish part of Sápmi, noteworthy scholarship has been generated on the topic of counter-mapping, a practice of resistance employed in order to add nuance to the dominant assumptions of the “One-World World”.¹⁰⁰ In Laver, the site of a proposed open-pit copper mine, Rebecca Lawrence and Rasmus Larsen have engaged in a community-based impact assessment research which also resulted in the making of alternative maps on the impact of the mine.¹⁰¹ Their research concludes in an appeal to “ontological self-determination” in the permitting processes for mines in Sweden.

In a comparison of Sámi and Aboriginal experiences of extractivism in Sweden and Australia, Kristina MacNeil introduces the concept of extractive violence. Drawing her data from interviews, the author discovered on both continents that it is the relationship to the land that extractive violence poses the biggest threat to. She defines extractive violence as a

⁹⁷ Gilbert, *To be published. Sept. 2022*, p. 2.

⁹⁸ N. Naffine, 'Legal Personality and the Natural World: On the Persistence of the Human Measure of Value', *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*, 3/Special Issue (2012), 68-83, p. 68.

⁹⁹ Gilbert, *To be published. Sept. 2022*.

¹⁰⁰ Escobar, 2016.

¹⁰¹ R. Lawrence and R. Kløcker Larsen, 'The Politics of Planning: Assessing the Impacts of Mining on Sami Lands', *Third World Quarterly*, 38/5 (2017), 1164-80.

“form of direct violence against people and/or animals and nature caused by extractivism” in the face of unjust societal structures.¹⁰²

Through the framework of organised hypocrisy, Mörkenstam analyses how the international indigenous rights regime is translated into the domestic level in Sweden. His study of case law such as the Girjas and the Rönnbäcken Case finds that organised hypocrisy — constituted of a gap between talk, decisions and actions — manifests itself in the unfulfilled claim of the Sámi peoples’ rights to self-determination, despite its recognition on the national and international level.¹⁰³

Only a small body of literature exists on the Gállok mine itself. Based on observations, interviews and documents, Sofia Persson, David Harnesk and Mine Islar suggest that the conflict is symbolic of a broader struggle over social status and recognition of the Sámi people. They find that the importance of the reindeer, whose grazing routes the mine would destroy, goes beyond economic survival of the local peoples and extends all the way to the language, the culture and the handicraft.

The Gállok mining conflict is also mentioned in an important piece of (Sámi) indigenous research. *Re:mindings*, a collective contribution and counter-narrative to the dominant academic debate, emerged from a symposium on “*Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges and Understandings of Land-, Water-, Body-, and Lab-scapes*”. Gunilla Larsson, Markus Nyström and Tor Tuorda contribute to this publication with their respective analyses on Gállok. Larsson revisits the coloniality of archaeological investigations that precede the permitting of mines. She points out that many Sámi memories are not written down or otherwise documented, thus the Sámi heritage is “preserved in the ground” and under particular threat to be eradicated through extractivist sites.¹⁰⁴ Nyström criticises the economised perception of value. This dominant perception does not only enable the extractivist mindset, it also poses a threat to the environmental and indigenous peoples’ movement from within. Based on a discourse analysis on value in Sápmi, he contends that many of the arguments of environmental activists and indigenous

¹⁰² K. Sehlin Macneil, 'Extractive Violence on Indigenous Country Sami and Aboriginal Views on Conflicts and Power Relations with Extractive Industries', (Umeå University, 2017); p. xi.

¹⁰³ U. Mörkenstam, 'Organised Hypocrisy? The Implementation of the International Indigenous Rights Regime in Sweden', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 23/10 (2019), 1718-41.

¹⁰⁴ G. Larsson, 'Protecting Our Memory from Being Blasted Away Archaeological Supradisciplinary Research Retracing Sámi History in Gállok/Kallak', in M. Öhman, H. Maruyama J. Gärdebo (ed.), *RE: Mindings Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges* (55; Uppsala: Uppsala Multiethnic Papers, 2014), p. 44.

peoples themselves have been tainted by this economised perception of value.¹⁰⁵ An example is the pragmatic argument that a mine in Gállok would be profitable for 30 years, whereas reindeer husbandry is profitable for 300 years, an argument that forgets to stress its value beyond economic terms — for identity, history and place. Tuorda, respectively, narrates the trajectory of his activism, his experience of racial discrimination and the misconduct of the company Beowulf Mining Plc. in the decade-long attempt to be granted permission for an iron-ore mine in Gállok. His article reviews his extensive study of the company's reports and documents and his investigation of the consequences a mine in Gállok would have on the people and the landscape. He highlights the importance of local activists, whose efforts alone are what has preserved the nature around Kvikkjokk, which has thus far been untouched by extractive industries, but would be destroyed in the event of the Gállok mine. He describes as a key event in the mobilisation against the mine the speech given at a stakeholder meeting in Stockholm by Beowulf chairman Clive Sinclair-Poulton, in which he famously exclaimed “What local people?!” when asked about the opinions of the local population.¹⁰⁶

In *Wild Landscapes*, Tom Mels examines how the creation of National Parks along the imaginary of “undisturbed nature” and “inaccessible and pristine mountains”¹⁰⁷ has been at odds with the Sámi population who — despite National parks being considered the Swedish people's common natural heritage — are regarded as a problem

A significant number of scholars from various disciplines have made sense of these dynamics and phenomena through the framework of colonisation. “*Jag behöver ingen koloni – jag har ju Norrland*”,¹⁰⁸ is what Lord High Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna (1583-1654) famously exclaimed. The body of literature on the topic adds nuance to this self-assertion.

Applying a historical archaeological perspective, Ojala connects early modern mining practices in Sweden with present-day extractivism.¹⁰⁹ His work understands early mining and the collecting of Sámi materials in Sápmi as well as current-day extractive practices as

¹⁰⁵ M. Nyström, 'In Defense of the Intolerable Condition of Prevailing Darkness Places That Matter – Uppsala, Syter Valley, Rönnbäck, Gállok', in M. Öhman, H. Maruyama J. Gärdebo (ed.), *RE: Mindings Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges* (55; Uppsala: Uppsala Multiethnic Papers, 2014).

¹⁰⁶ Tuorda, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ T. Mels, *Wild Landscapes: The Cultural Nature of Swedish National Parks* (Lund: KFS Lund AB, 1999), p. 12-15.

¹⁰⁸ To English: “I do not need a colony — I have Norrland!”

¹⁰⁹ Ojala and Nordin, 2015; C.-G. Ojala, 'Mines and Missions: Early Modern Swedish Colonialism in Sápmi and Its Legacies Today', *Vertaisarvioitu Kollegialt Granskad*, (2020), 160-76.

colonial acts, urging us to consider this in the country's heritage management and the debate on Sámi rights.¹¹⁰

Looking at the hydropower town of Porjus, Össbo challenges the narrative of hydropower being a driver of modernisation and development.¹¹¹ Due to their impact on reindeer grazing lands, the author frames hydropower development as a “large-scale landscape conversion”¹¹², asserting that it is its “colonial governmentality”¹¹³ that has enabled the industrialisation of waters in Sweden.

Pointing out that colonial politics and an imperial mindset include the reproduction of race ideology, the looting of nature, ‘othering’ and missionarism, Naum and Nordin support the argument that Sápmi was subject to colonisation by the Nordic States/kingdoms.¹¹⁴

If the extractive violence, the ontological suppression and the exploitation of the environment in Sápmi are understood as manifestations of colonisation, then the analysis calls for a decolonial lens. How such a lens is applied on the concepts of human rights, Rights of Nature and extractivism is revisited in Chapter 4.

3.3 Outlook and Research Gap

This literature review began by highlighting some of the vast work that exists around the topic of extractivism, human rights and Rights of Nature. The remainder of this study embarks from the notion that the Sámi Parliament signing a declaration on RoN deserves scholarly attention as it poses important questions not only on the exploitation of Sápmi, but also on the concept of RoN itself. A study of this gap will offer insights on the ontological premises that human rights and Rights of Nature and how they might differ between different groups. Another research gap yawns at the crossroads of ontological debates in the context

¹¹⁰ Ojala, 2020.

¹¹¹ Å. Össbo and P. Lantto, 'Colonial Tutelage and Industrial Colonialism: Reindeer Husbandry and Early 20th-Century Hydroelectric Development in Sweden', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 36/3 (2011), 324-48; Å. Össbo, 'Hydropower Company Sites: A Study of Swedish Settler Colonialism', *Settler Colonial Studies*, (2022), 1-18.

¹¹² Össbo and Lantto, 2011.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ M. Naum & J. M. Nordin, *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity. Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*. (Heidelberg: Springer Science+Business Media, 2013); G. Fur, 'Colonialism and Swedish History: Unthinkable Connections?', in M. Naum & J. M. Nordin (ed.), *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity* (Heidelberg: Springer Science+Business Media, 2013), 17–36, pp. 26-27.

of the Gállok mine. While the decade-old proposal has received a new wave of media attention at the beginning of this year, the scholarly output on it is inadequate.

4 Theory Chapter

This chapter introduces the theoretical toolkit this study uses to understand to what extent the frameworks of RoN and human rights can mitigate the effects of extractivism in Sápmi. The research problem is analysed with a decolonial lens. Each subchapter will elaborate how this lens applies to extractivism (4.1), human rights (4.2) and RoN (4.3).

4.1 Extractivism: Imperialism and Sacrifice Zones

In order to grasp the phenomenon of extractivism on a theory level, Naomi Klein, Kyle Whyte and Linda Tuhiwai Smith are consulted.

Following colonial studies and critical environmental studies, Whyte considers that (settler) colonialism in itself is an ecological domination by virtue of it disrupting the relationships between humans and the environment.¹¹⁵ It is thus a root cause of contemporary environmental injustices, working “strategically to undermine Indigenous peoples’ social resilience as self-determining collectives”¹¹⁶. Following Whyte, the underlying problem with extractivism is the pace at which it decides on ecological change and landscape transformation, too rapid for any local community to adjust without reducing their self-determination and inflicting socio-cultural harms.¹¹⁷ This, deep down, is what threatens the qualities of relationships between the land and the people inhabiting it.

To extend this line of thought, Klein brings a wider perspective to the symptoms of extractivism. She theorises that contemporary societies are inherently extractive. She explains this through the concept of “sacrifice zones” on the backs of which supposed progress is carried out. The exploitation of these zones is considered a worthwhile sacrifice for the maximisation of benefits to society as a whole (a logic that is inherently utilitarian) and what justifies their destruction is the categorisation of a “whole subset of humanity (...)

¹¹⁵ K. Whyte, 'Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice', *Environment and Society*, 9/1 (2018), 125-44.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 125.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*.

as less than fully human”¹¹⁸. This perspective brings to light the ways in which extractivism is inextricably linked to imperialism and racial superiority; the sacrifice zone is disposable in order to serve the needs of the ruling elite, whilst the extractor does not recognise the value of the extractive site beyond economic terms.¹¹⁹ This draws back to the aforementioned relationship with the earth, which under extractivism becomes nonreciprocal, “purely of taking”, built on the idea that nature is limitless.¹²⁰

On the topic of human-nature relationships and indigenous self-determination, Tuhiwai Smith points out that the knowledge of indigenous peoples “based on spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen”, have a trajectory of not being accepted by Western knowledge systems. She further emphasises that decolonising remains an ongoing process precisely because colonialism is far from being “finished business”¹²¹. Her work is an important reminder that imperialism does not manifest itself only on the physiological level (raw materials and military strength), but also on the mental sphere (knowledge), long after independence is gained or self-determination has been asserted.¹²²

Taking these contemplations to the topic of human rights and Rights of Nature, the support of indigenous peoples’ claim to self-determination (understood as, following Viaene, the “control over their own ways of knowing, being and living”¹²³) crystallises as quintessential.

4.2 Human Rights: Decolonial Theory and Ontologies

The so-called “textbook narrative” tells the origin story of human rights along the lines of continuous moral progress, unquestioned universality and tends to place human rights within a tradition of Western thought.¹²⁴ While the precise moment of nascence varies within this narrative — ranging from the Enlightenment, the subsequent 1776 US *Declaration of*

¹¹⁸ N. Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), p. 355.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹²¹ L. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2008), p. 24.

¹²² See also: E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

¹²³ Viaene, 2021.

¹²⁴ Rajagopal, 2003, p. 176; M. Halme-Tuomisaari and P. Slotte, 'Revisiting the Origins of Human Rights: Introduction.', in M. Halme-Tuomisaari & P. Slotte (ed.), *Revisiting the Origins of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-36; Barreto, 2018.

Independence and the French 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948 — these add nuance to the rather unanimously suggested notion that human rights are the epitome of human progress.¹²⁵ In a spirit of academic rigour, it is as much a concern as a challenge to unlearn some of the things the textbook narrative takes for granted.

Instead of re-telling the origin story, this thesis seeks to “methodologise” human rights, to borrow from Henrietta Moore, by examining their role in the conflict of the Gállok mine and ascertaining to what extent they can be a tool against extractive practices. In Moore’s words human rights might be considered a “concept-metaphor”, which she defines as “a space of theoretical abstraction and processes, experiences and connections in the world, important not only to social scientists but now part of most people’s imagined and experienced worlds”.¹²⁶

The line of criticism relevant for this study stems from decolonial theory as an explanation of one of the ‘root causes’ of human rights violations.¹²⁷ Understanding decolonial thinking as a form of dialectics, Barreto suggests that it involves three moments: a critical moment, opposed by constructive moment and followed by an encounter between the two. Translated to the “quest for decolonising human rights”¹²⁸, this comprises a critique of Eurocentric thinking, a retrieval of perspectives from colonised spheres, and the establishment of a dialogue between these.

The first moment: The unfulfilled adoption of the ILO169 in Sweden begs the question of the broader circumstances this hesitation to ratify stands in. Mörkenstam has named this phenomenon ‘organised hypocrisy’ (see chapter 3.2)¹²⁹, while Reetta Toivanen points out that human rights are not born into a vacuum — instead, they are entangled with the interests of governments.¹³⁰ Yet, there is a link missing between extractivist practices in Sweden and the way they hold back the fulfilment of many human rights claims of the Sámi people. In this context, it is useful to recall the colonial origins of extractivism (see chapter 4.1). Following José-Manuel Barreto, this “universal validity of European notions”¹³¹ needs to be

¹²⁵ Halme-Tuomisaari and Slotte, 2015.

¹²⁶ H. Moore, 'Global Anxieties', *Anthropological Theory*, 4/1 (2016), 71-88, p. 71.

¹²⁷ Susan Marks, 'Human Rights and Root Causes', *The Modern Law Review*, 74/1 (2011), 57-78.

¹²⁸ Barreto, 2018.

¹²⁹ Mörkenstam, 2019.

¹³⁰ Toivanen, 2019; Tănăsescu, 2022.

¹³¹ Barreto, 2018.

critiqued for its trajectory as a tool in the suppression of the colonised world.¹³² Multiple authors point out moments in the record of colonialism where international institutions and law have played a justificatory role.¹³³ The writings of Grotius, Locke and Hobbes, some of the most influential thinkers of early natural law — “the conceptual predecessor and historical source of human rights”¹³⁴ — have served the primary purpose to justify the looting and accumulation that accompanied colonialism. By the same token, the premises of Enlightenment have continuously been used for the subordination of the native populations all over the world.¹³⁵ Against this background, Garzón notes that it is not a coincidence that (indigenous) peoples are granted rights on the one hand, without the power to govern themselves on the other hand, creating an empty legal space.¹³⁶ This gap between having rights but not a State that represents the rights-bearer contributes to the implementation gap of human rights.¹³⁷

This analytical lens is sought to be helpful in order to recognise the indeterminacy that many argue law is prone to — suggesting that the law allows “the defence of whatever position”¹³⁸ if justified by the adequate language. Following this logic means acknowledging that human rights, too, can be utilised in different ways and to different ends — they can be utilised as a tool of resistance against the (colonial) abuse of power.¹³⁹

For the purpose of this thesis human rights are thus regarded as the possible means to an end rather than as the end itself.¹⁴⁰

After engaging in Barreto’s first moment of decoloniality — a critique of Eurocentric thinking in the realm of human rights — the analysis (chapter 6) will consider a retrieval of

¹³² Barreto, 2018.

¹³³ R. Williams, 'Columbus's Legacy: Law as an Instrument of Racial Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples' Rights of Self-Determination', *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law* 8/2 (1991), 51-76; Shetty, 2018; Barreto, 2018; Garzón, 2019; N. Sharma, *Home Rule. National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants* (London: Duke University Press, 2020); Viaene, 2022.

¹³⁴ Barreto, 2018.

¹³⁵ Williams, 1991; Viaene, 2022.

¹³⁶ H. Gaski, 'The Sami People: The "White Indians" of Scandinavia', *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 17/1 (1993), 115-28; Barreto, 2018; Garzón, 2019.

¹³⁷ L. Viaene, D. J. Montalván-Zambrano and M. X. González-Serrano, 'Hacia La Descolonización Del Régimen Extractivo: Patronos Y Límites De La Judicialización En Conflictos Mineros', *Íconos - Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 72 (2021), 97-116.

¹³⁸ M. Koskeniemi, 'Letter to the Editors of the Symposium', *American Journal of International Law*, 93/2 (1999), 351-61, p. 354.

¹³⁹ S. Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of Global Values*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Shetty, 2018; Barreto, 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Shetty, 2018; Barreto, 2018.

alternative perspectives, with the discussion (chapter 7) beginning a dialogue between the two.

4.3 Rights of Nature: the Colonial Legacy of Rights

If both extractivism and human rights inherit a colonial legacy, then it becomes at least worthy to ask to what extent another set of rights can bring an end to extractivist practices on indigenous land.¹⁴¹ Much as in human rights, the analysis of Rights of Nature gains depth when understood through patterns that shape the world they are born into.

What the decolonial lens brings to RoN is the insight that international law itself is entangled with the remains of colonial power-structures. This indeed is something the RoN proposal raises awareness for, by pointing out the fact that in common international law, nature remains treated as property and as a source of wealth with the sole purpose to enable development.¹⁴² Currently, the UN human rights system reinforces these colonially-shaped human-nature relations; the proclamation of water and sanitation as a human rights in 2010 builds on the dominant assumption of water as a commodity.¹⁴³

The awareness of colonial remains is particularly important in a legal movement that focuses on *prima facie* apolitical values, such as that of harmony with nature. As Toivanen remarks, the notion of indigenous peoples living in harmony with nature has a trajectory of condemning them to the apolitical. This is precisely something that has deprived indigenous peoples of their distinct agency in the political and activist sphere.¹⁴⁴

Hence, from a decolonial perspective, RoN should avoid the ignorance of indigenous philosophies as much as their appropriation, it should not be unreflexive of the colonial inheritance of rights nor fall into the traps of “an enthusiastic belief in the power of rights discourse”.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ A. Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, 21/2-3 (2007), 168-78; Barreto, 2018; Viaene, 2022.

¹⁴² Boyd, 2018.

¹⁴³ Viaene, 2022.

¹⁴⁴ C. Baglo, 'Rethinking Sami Agency During Living Exhibitions.', in L. Graham & H.G. Penny (ed.), *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 136-68; Toivanen, 'European Fantasy of the Arctic Region', 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Tănăsescu, 2022, p. 42.

5 Methodological Considerations

The methods used for this thesis are a combination of deductive theoretical contemplation and inductive (observational) research. This approach is based on the premise that a theoretical approach alone would generate a very different, arguably less well-informed outcome, than an approach that allows for both theory and practice to enter into dialogue, to contradict or reaffirm one another.

5.1 Empirical Data and Methods

In order to find answers to the question of how RoN and human rights can mitigate the effects of extractivism in Sápmi, a mixed method approach is used within the qualitative tradition¹⁴⁶, applying several different methods of data collection and analysing these by means of content analysis, a method of interpretation that, according to Prior, “crosses the divide between “quantitative” and “qualitative” modes of inquiry in social research and offers a new dimension to the meaning of mixed-methods research”¹⁴⁷.

This allows us to move beyond paradigms of conventional qualitative research. This study understands human rights as a field that aims to overcome disciplinary barriers, adapting to challenges of complexity and epistemology by consulting various disciplines ranging from philosophy, political science and law to anthropology and political ecology. Human rights are not characterised merely by their legal obligations, they also evolve with moral norms, political context and have social, economic and anthropological meanings.¹⁴⁸ It hence “constitutes a natural field for (...) methodological heterogeneity”.¹⁴⁹ This study uses a sequential approach to mixed methods, beginning with a structured content analysis of different sets of primary and secondary data and adopting an ethnography-inspired empirical investigation “in order to test, confirm, deepen or extend the findings”.¹⁵⁰ The primary data that is being gathered are social media interactions, public statements and documents from activists and the Sámi Parliament and interviews. These will be analysed in pair with

¹⁴⁶ M. Langford, 'Interdisciplinarity and Multimethod Research', in H.-O. Sano, S. Mcinerney-Lankford and B. A. Andreassen (ed.), *Research Methods in Human Rights. A Handbook* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017).

¹⁴⁷ L. Prior, 'Content Analysis', in P. Leavy (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 378.

¹⁴⁸ Langford, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 161.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 187.

secondary data, namely ethnographically inspired field observations from a ten-day research stay in Jokkmokk in early 2022.

In more concrete terms, the primary data on the social media interactions consists of a 20 page document compiling the written text of social media posts from this year, 2022. Some of these posts are as short as a couple of lines, others are 200 word long texts or even small opinion pieces, at times tagging the social mediate outlets of relevant national politicians. These posts stem from the public Facebook group “Gruvfritt Jokkmokk”, from individual activists who have been anonymised as well as from the Instagram account @gruvfrittjokkmokk. For example, the latter launched a 30-day initiative named “DÁT LA GÁLLOK - THIS IS GÁLLOK - DET HÄR ÄR GÁLLOK”, posting a series of photos with text that depict the multiple facets of Gállok, the site of the proposed mine, from the lens of the local people. One example quote from such social media posts that are collected and run through a structured content analysis reads as follows: “A wounded river with beaches full of grief over what has disappeared, but still with water clean enough to be a source of water for 100,000 people. Do not let another wound in the ground, an incurably gigantic mining wound, jeopardize it.” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 41). These are coded according to several themes, some of which were predestined (human rights, Rights of Nature and Sámi ontologies), whilst others have emerged during the research, such as the notion of time (“still with water clean enough”), survival (“incurably gigantic”) and the personification of nature (“a wounded river”; “beaches full of grief”). It might be worth noting that establishing these themes is already in part analytical work. For this, I first generate a frequency list of the themes appearing in the data, before moving onto more qualitative terms and interpreting how the themes running through the texts are creating a “semantic web”¹⁵¹. This set of primary data are referenced in-text as “digital ethnographic notes”, and the translations from Swedish to English are done by the author.

Another set of primary data to which the same coding is applied, emerges from online statements and petitions launched by activists and the Sámi Parliament of Sweden. These include the petition “För levande kultur och ren natur i ett gruvfritt Jokkmokk” to the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation within the government of Sweden, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention on Laponia which is cross-referenced in many of the aforementioned data, as well as the final opinion of the Sámi Parliament on a new mine in

¹⁵¹ Prior, 2014, p. 371.

Gállók, submitted in February 2022. This data set is referenced in-text as “public documents”.

Finally, the written notes of the semi-structured interview with renowned and well-respected Sámi politician Stefan Mikaelsson, will be consulted. Interviews are the “conversational process of knowing”¹⁵². Due to constraints linked to accessibility, I was only able to conduct one of them and this does limit their representativeness – making it important to be cautious about generalisability. Nevertheless, it might reinforce or dispute the importance of some of the main themes such as human rights, Rights of Nature or extractivism. Brinkmann emphasises that the “human self exists only within what philosopher Charles Taylor has called “webs of interlocution” which makes interviews a constructive research method for social sciences.¹⁵³ Thus, even though only a thin addition, a long interview can add another, valuable, layer to the data: in the words of Prior, even “an N of 1 can be immensely informative, and whether we like it or not we often have only one N to study”¹⁵⁴. This interview was conducted in a semi-structured way. Following the logic of Brinkmann that interviews can and should neither be entirely unstructured nor entirely structured, I prepared questions in order to lead the interlocutors to elaborate on certain themes without nudging a certain opinion on these themes.¹⁵⁵ This practice of allowing the object to object, according to Latour, is the essence of objectivity in social sciences like human rights studies.¹⁵⁶ I therefore tried to create a space that allows my interlocutor to be “fully involved in what is said about themselves by others”¹⁵⁷, and allowing for a disobedience to concepts that might be held at high value in the theoretical part of this study. Conversations allow an insight into how people “talk, experience the world, how they think, act, feel, and develop as individuals and in groups”¹⁵⁸ which makes qualitative interviewing a meaningful research method in certain contexts. In practice, this means that I follow the structure of asking, negotiating the meaning of the question with the interlocutor, listening to the description from the interviewee, summarising the answer and permitting the interviewee to validate or correct

¹⁵² S. Brinkmann, 'Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing', in P. Leavy (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 278.

¹⁵³ C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 36; Brinkmann, 'Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing', 2014, p. 278.

¹⁵⁴ Prior, 2014, p. 370.

¹⁵⁵ Brinkmann, 2014.

¹⁵⁶ B. Latour, 'When Things Strike Back: A Possible Contribution of ‘Science Studies’ to the Social Sciences', *The British journal of sociology* 51/1 (2000), 107-23.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 116.

¹⁵⁸ Brinkmann, 2014, p. 277.

my understanding. In the interview with Stefan Mikaelsson, a long-term and well-respected Sámi politician, this has proven to be a particularly important practice as our worlds were meeting in the interview, requiring a back and forth between his words and my understanding of them. This is epitomised in our conversation on whether the decision of the Sámi parliament to endorse a Rights of Nature declaration was a strategic choice. It took several takes of correcting my understanding of this decision until it was validated by my interlocutor, or as de la Cadena describes it, until we both accepted that this is how far of a common ground we can create and not further - this difficulty to communicate occurred a number of times, especially when “I insisted on understanding in my own terms”¹⁵⁹, to use the words of de la Cadena.

After conducting the interview, I applied content analysis to the written notes I had taken concurrently in order to analyse the occurrence of recurrent and novel themes and their connections. This approach is further inspired by Altheide who coined the notion of ethnographic content analysis, which adds to traditional content analysis the “reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection, and analysis.”¹⁶⁰

Next, my fieldnotes from a visit to Jokkmokk in February 2022 are analysed. As they already are a form of analysis, they constitute secondary data. These notes include observations I made in public spaces, on institutions such as the Ájtte museum or the public library, opening hours, brief social interactions and by the observation of murals.

Ethnography is a methodology that involves participant-observation, gathering material, keeping notes, informal discussions, structured interviews, textual analysis and the examination of historical background of the context that is researched. Thus, this methodology certainly centres around the importance of place, but it goes beyond that by also requiring “a certain frame of mind” and historical sensibility.¹⁶¹ The way it plays a role in this study is by its function to be a “sophisticated project of making sense of social life through the ways of knowing that are most meaningful and potentially most consequential to social actors themselves – participant observation – analysis of terrain, climate, soft and hard infrastructure”.¹⁶² At the same time, it is a methodology with a historical baggage; it is

¹⁵⁹ De La Cadena, 2015, p. xxv.

¹⁶⁰ D. Altheide, 'Plugged in Research', *Qualitative Media Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2011), p. 4.

¹⁶¹ A. K. Harrison, 'Ethnography', in P. Leavy (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 225.

¹⁶² Harrison, 2014, p. 224.

originally motivated by the racially loaded exoticising of people that the researcher views as distinct to themselves.¹⁶³ By investigating how Sámi people in and around Jokkmokk perceive extractivism, human rights and Rights of Nature, another layer will be added to the understanding of the topic. This understanding can only be deeper than that previously acquired through a theoretical lens.

5.2 On Data Validity

The different data sets all have their individual validity and limitations, and combined they create a bigger picture of what the Gállok mine really means to the local Sámi people and what human rights and nature ontologies their arguments are based on. Contrary to a romanticised view of indigenous cultures, indigenous peoples around the world have integrated and mastered the use of technology into their cultures and traditions.¹⁶⁴ As Sapignoli demonstrates, social media is an important element of indigenous activism and networking.¹⁶⁵ This is due to the relative “freedom from editorial censorship and a high degree of distant cooperation”¹⁶⁶ as well as the role social media plays in the construction of a joint identity through algorithms and preferential selection of content that networks such as Facebook and Instagram involve.¹⁶⁷

Often a space of mutual concern, empowerment and mobilisation, the value that social media has can be observed in the Sámi community too. The most prominent activists in the Gállok mining struggle connect with one another via (public) Facebook groups, engage in threads, post statements on Instagram and use these platforms in order to spread petitions. Thus, the validity of social media interactions to the ethnographer lies in the validity of these networks to indigenous activists.

Social media has become everyday practice for society as much as for social researchers.¹⁶⁸ In the course of the research, social media, especially Facebook and Instagram have played a vital role from the outset. This makes it hard to think of any ethnographic research without

¹⁶³ Harrison, 2014.

¹⁶⁴ M. Sapignoli, *Hunting Justice: Displacement, Law, and Activism in the Kalahari* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2018); B. Kapferer and D. Theodossopoulos, *Against Exoticism: Toward the Transcendence of Relativism and Universalism in Anthropology* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ A. Caliandro, 'Digital Methods for Ethnography: Analytical Concepts for Ethnographers Exploring Social Media Environments', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, (2017).

the consideration of online spaces.¹⁶⁹ It was the starting point even for the offline fieldwork conducted for this thesis, as social media is the place to find the people that are involved in this struggle and it has sometimes proven to be a more fruitful way to connect than via email. Antagonistically to the most dominant trends in anthropology, Feldmann argues that the legitimacy of localised participant-observation tends to be overstated.¹⁷⁰ He points out what he names a certain ‘empiricist anxiety’ among ethnographers to frantically seek to gather knowledge first hand through direct personal experience and immersion. According to Feldmann, this conviction builds on the fallacy that in-person immersion equals limitless access to a situation, the participants’ thoughts or agendas — whereas in fact limits to access remain, confining even participant-observation to a sort of second-hand experience. This could be confirmed by the hostility of the weather and the pandemic which limited access on site. Underlying this anxiety is the positivist commitment that only what can be observed is true. Reducing ways of knowing to sensory experience seems at unease with some of the pre-theoretical commitments human rights struggles build on, because what is being claimed (collective rights or the suffering of nature) cannot be derived from scientific methods. Following Feldmann’s observation that empirical purism can pose limits on ethnography, this ethnographically inspired research relies to large extents on online interactions of Sámi activists in Sweden. Despite the value that this perspective adds to non-local ethnography, this study also builds on the conviction that place, presence and human interaction are bound to add further layers to the issues discussed, some of which might even be indispensable, especially as place and belonging to land play an important role in both activism and indigenous human rights. I borrow the notion of the ‘importance of place’ from political ecology, a field that particularly values “the importance of place in shaping the conditions of exploitation and of protest or mobilization”¹⁷¹. Wendy Wolford and Sara Keene observe how multiple studies on indigenous peoples emphasise that place is an important element in the mobilisation of activists against extractive imaginaries and practices.¹⁷² How identity and place mutually condition one another, including in activism, can also be noted in the context

¹⁶⁹ Caliandro, 2017.

¹⁷⁰ G. Feldman, 'If Ethnography Is More Than Participant-Observation, Then Relations Are More Than Connections: The Case for Nonlocal Ethnography in a World of Apparatuses', *Anthropological Theory*, 11/4 (2011), 375-95.

¹⁷¹ W. Wolford and S. Keene, 'Social Movements', in G. Bridge, T. Perreault, and J. McCarthy (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 577.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

of the Sámi people in North Sweden. Not only is their identity strongly linked to the place, but also this identity fluctuates and changes with the place changing, for example due to climate change or extractive interventions such as foresting, hydropower plants or mines. Further, in the context of the Gállok mine and more broadly of colonial patterns, it can be constructive to give visibility to those people local to the place that appears empty enough to some to serve extractivist practices. During fieldwork, snowy and cold weather, the Covid-19 pandemic's Omicron wave, and the visit of Greta Thunberg at the same time created significant obstacles to the ethnographic access. Yet, taking the train journey from southern Sweden to Jokkmokk, moving around the place, interacting with locals, being a customer in the local café, visiting the museum, holding informal conversations and witnessing a manifestation against the Gállok mine did contribute in many subtle ways to a somewhat deeper understanding of the place. However, it was also a reminder of how much can be found out online, with the means of Google maps, pictures, Facebook, Instagram and SVT play.

5.3 Ethics and Positionality

It is a fallacy to believe that studying a marginalised group, even as an ally, is inherently good. Research is not exempt from power-structures and the narration of colonial power relations bears the risk of reproducing racialised stereotypes. For the ethical considerations of this thesis, it is crucial to remark that historically most interventions in Sápmi and most interactions with Sámi people have been driven by the pursuit of political control (see Chapter 2.2).¹⁷³ Even with the best intentions of bringing forward Sámi ontologies and supporting Sámi struggles, this legacy is imperative to acknowledge when considering my own positionality as a white western scholar at one of the biggest universities of the country that has significantly contributed to the colonisation of Sápmi. This plays into the ethics that were considered before and as the fieldwork was conducted. The pandemic had just entered a novel stage as I began to conduct my fieldwork, making it more likely than ever to pass on the disease and close to impossible to avoid infection. As regular testing and mask-wearing was all I could do to protect myself and others, I constrained all encounters with Sámi activists to the outdoors and renounced opportunities of meetings that would have to be held

¹⁷³ Kapferer and Theodossopoulos, 2016.

indoors, which due to the short daylight hours and cold temperatures caused a serious constraint but it was more important to stick to the ethics than to forcefully extract information out of Jokkmokk.

6 Analysis

In asking to what extent a human rights and a Rights of Nature framework can mitigate the effects of extractivism in Sápmi, meaningful insights emerge from consulting the local population.

The analysis is conducted through the three themes — human rights, RoN, extractivism. The following three sub chapters analyse and compare the various data: social media content, the petition and policy statement (together referred to as digital activism), an interview and the ethnographic fieldwork.

6.1 Human Rights in Practice – Empty Words?

The first theme this study has sought to analyse is that of human rights; what role they play in the Gállok conflict, to what extent they can be a decolonial tool and how Sámi people themselves use them in the context of extractivism. The **social media posts** written by local political activists in order to express their disapproval of the Gállok mine proposal ahead of the government's decision – which at the time was still pending – brings some empirical insights to the previous theoretical contemplations, and so do the **interview** with Sámi politician Stefan Mikaelsson and the Fridays for Future protest that the author witnessed during **fieldwork**.

Digital Activism Analysis:

The first observation from the content analysis of the social media data is that human rights are mentioned at a relatively low frequency in the overall discourse. In quantitative terms, human rights found just four explicit mentions in over 50 of the social media posts that have been analysed. One striking quote on tourism and extractivism in Sápmi reads as follows:

“Apart from the whole discourse about the rights of the Sámi, the fjällvärlden is actually more than just a playground for humans. It is not a human right that just because you want to kill an hour of your life, you shall get a helicopter up to that and that side of the mountain to be able to slip down again and again.” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 21)

An element of contempt is apparent within this quote, for the anthropocentric ways in which human rights can be (mis)used. It is followed by the qualifier that if the activist “*could wish for anything, it is respect for all living things that call nature its home.*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 21). This reads as a plea to not overstate the *human* of the human rights and use them as a thought-terminating cliché. Another social media entry explains that:

“Most people who today live and work in Lilla Lule älvdal have deep roots in the area. For many, it is a Sami heritage, whether they see themselves as Sami today or not. (...) Regardless, the relationship to the land and the feeling for the heritage you have received is strong. That legacy is torn apart if a mine is allowed to scarce the land.” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 15)

If this understanding of human rights is shared in a broader consensus among Sámi environmental activists, it could explain why the occasional reference to human rights does take place in the discourse around the Gállok mine without seeming at the forefront of the debate. As the following examples of social media interactions show, the classic human rights language tends to be only chosen whenever the Gállok mine is knotted to the global threads that this conflict is embedded in, such as the multinational company Beowulf (“*Sad to see people’s pension money invested in projects that violate human rights!*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 21) or the United Nations human rights regime (public documents, 2022).

The theme of colonialism is more frequent than the theme of human rights itself. One Sámi environmental activist shared a video of a bulldozer clearing a forest, underlined with haunting music and a text that reads “*Colonialism, Sápmi*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 38). Another decolonial reference can be found in the group description of the Facebook Group “Gruvfritt Jokkmokk”, stating that the group does not have a leader, “*no colonial hierarchy*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 1). Another post explicitly states that the

“colonial doctrine that characterizes our region is defined by the industry first determining its conditions and then reindeer husbandry, other Sámi industries and land users are expected to adapt to these. The arguments are the jobs, the growth and the green transition that have been kidnapped to make things sound better.” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 24).

The green transition, supposedly through iron ore, is dismantled here as just another justifier of colonial practices.¹⁷⁴

Next, the analysis of the human rights theme regards documents and petitions. The petition that was launched in order to stop the government approving the proposed Gállok mine contains as the only rights language the right of the indigenous Sámi people as defined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In a similar vein, the Consultation Response of the Sámi Parliament of Sweden from 02-02-2022 only appeals to the notion of human rights in the context of the UN's Universal Periodic Review of how Sweden meets its commitments to human rights criticising "*the inability of the state to take into account Sámi rights on issues to do with the exploitation of land and water within Sápmi*"¹⁷⁵ (public documents, 2022).

Interview Analysis:

In the interview with Sámi Parliament politician and former president Stefan Mikaelsson, human rights were mentioned, again, only in the context of international human rights mechanism or with the immediate qualifier that it is impossible to draw a harsh line between humans and nature: "*Humans are part of the environment and nature and humans are part of the circumpolar. In the Arctic anyways, if we don't protect nature our culture and rights will disappear*" (Mikaelsson, 2022). Beyond this, the interview analysis suggests that law or therefore *rights* are closely linked to colonial practices, including in the context of the Sápmi. A prominent example is the 1928 Swedish reindeer herding law which divided Sámi people from one another by being discriminative against women; "*all colonisers are aware that if you want to collapse a culture you should discriminate the women who inherit the culture to the children, and to the neighbours' children*" (Mikaelsson, 2022). In the same vein, he mentioned the borders drawn by nation states, who do not follow language, grazing lands or people. In between the lines, and also reading from the tone of the interlocutor, it is plausible to guess that there is a certain frustration, a disappointment with rights — or at least with rights lacking the notion of self-determination.

¹⁷⁴ LKAB, 2022.

¹⁷⁵ L.-O. Sjaun and F. Österling, 'Opinion Regarding Application for Mining Concession for the Area Kallak K Nr 1 in Jåhkåmåhkke/Jokkmokk Municipality, Norrbotten County', *Consultation Response* (Giron (Kiruna) and Staare (Östersund): Sametinget, 2022).

Fieldwork Analysis:

During the fieldwork, the concept of human rights was not omnipresent either, neither in casual conversations nor in observations of the activism and the politics that are located in Jokkmokk. A few obvious indications include a concrete pillar outside the Ájtte Museum, indicating all the ratifiers to the ILO169. Another indication of human rights was the yellow and red banner saying “NO MINING IN GÁLLOK. REINDEER HERDING AREA. Respect Indigenous Rights. Us Local People” which was prominently displayed at the Fridays for Future Protest in front of the old pharmacy (Fieldnotes, p. 3). The theme of colonisation in turn was more obvious, appearing in casual conversations. One such informal conversation took place by a fire basket in the snow,¹⁷⁶ a meeting point created in order to make up for the cancelled Winter Market. Whilst warming up on reindeer skins next to the fire, an employee for Jokkmokks Kommun revealed how fragile the themes that this project investigates are on the ground. Even when not visible, the conflict over the Gállok mine seemed to hang like a ubiquitous cloud over every social interaction in Jokkmokk. Beginning the dialogue in a cautious tone, he revealed his opinion only as the researcher had positioned herself as an ally of the struggle against the mine. From then, almost naturally, he turned the dialogue to colonialism and its influences on Sápmi, describing it as a more “*subtle, slow and steady process*” (Fieldnotes, p. 2). There is “*so much talk of the government to preserve the little that is left of this culture, why do they want to build a mine that would not even be worthwhile?*” he said, concluding that “*it is brutal*” (Fieldnotes, p. 2). The researcher however was not generally met with such willingness to share; others disclaimed that they do not like to talk about politics, implying that it is too much trouble and an ungrateful task.

At the Fridays for Future protest, “Stop Green Colonialism” was displayed on one of the prominent hand-made signs, confirming that colonialism is at least as strong a concern as human rights violations — or possibly, they are closely linked. Hints towards a colonial past in Sápmi were also apparent inside the Ájtte Museum: one exhibition displayed the notion of the settler in a dichotomy to the reindeer herder, another one depicted the unreasonable taxes the crown used to demand from the Sámi people in the 16th and 17th centuries.

¹⁷⁶ Field observation: not many public indoor spaces are made available for the people in Jokkmokk with one exception being the bus stop.

6.2 Nature: Rights or Duties?

The second theme this study has intended to analyse is the concept of Rights of Nature, on the grounds that the Sámi Parliament has decided to endorse the UDRME. Following the same structure as 6.1, this section analyses which role they play on the ground for the Gállok mining conflict, exploring to what extent Rights of Nature can address the short-comings of human rights.

Digital Activism Analysis:

The concept of Rights of Nature has no explicit mentions in the social media interactions. This is not entirely conclusive as the Rights of Nature might have been mentioned in posts that have not been covered by this content analysis. Yet, this does indicate that RoN are at least not a go-to strategy at the forefront of the struggle against the Gállok mine. A language that the activists use much more in order to express their disapproval of the Gállok mine is one that personifies nature, understanding it as an agent that thinks, feels, remembers and communicates. The personification of nature is frequently found throughout the analysis. The following example describes past interventions in the local nature from the viewpoint of a flower, the red Alpine catchfly (*fjällnejlikan*)¹⁷⁷:

“With a view of Bargávrre, the fjällnejlikan waves to the west, sunbathing lying southwards. She usually thrives best on the bare mountains, but even here, in the forest country's mighty Átjek, she unexpectedly found a place in the world. Viscaria alpina is her Latin name, where viscaria testifies to sticky stalk. From here, she may have had time to see how the fall between Ráddnávrre and Bargávrre was strangled, and the surrounding forests cut down. And she thinks that's enough.” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 9)

Describing not only the point of view of the flower, but also its actions, the assumption that she has a memory which remembers the harm that has been done to the waterfall and the judges “*that's enough*”, all adds elements of agency to the natural entities that do not tend to be consulted at all in the decision-making process around mining projects.

¹⁷⁷ *Fjällnejlikan* is a small plant that stands out for its pink flower, growing mostly on rocks.

The personification of nature is a theme that consistently weaves through the analysis of the social media data: “*Eatnam*.¹⁷⁸ *I know she's slowly dying under my feet*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 18) states one post, whilst another one refers to the previous extractivist activities in the region around Jokkmokk and the consequent suffering of its nature:

“*A wounded river with beaches full of grief over what has disappeared, but still with water clean enough to be a source of water for 100,000 people. Do not let another wound in the ground, an incurably gigantic mining wound, jeopardize it.*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 41)

These ways of describing nature as an agent, capable of feeling, remembering and grudging resonate with the idea of granting (legal) personhood and standing to nature as ascertained in chapter 3.1.3. They also call attention to the severity of extractivist interventions not only for humans, but for entire ecosystems. Interestingly, this understanding does not seem to directly translate into a rights language. Instead of rights, indications of respect were found in the analysis relating to the theme of nature, i.e.: “*Nature gives, man receives. It requires humility and respect. Not roaring devastation*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 9).

Interview Analysis:

The interview was an opportunity to ask about the other-wise barely mentioned RoN. In response to a question regarding what reasoning and implications are behind the Sámi Parliament adopting the UDRME, Mikaelsson asserted that the Sámi Parliament is “*not worried about nature having certain rights*” that the decision was prompted by an overall concern about the wellbeing of both humans and nature in the Arctic conjunctively. Further, the RoN declaration was first and foremost a way of being able to “*affect the Swedish government with another argument*” (Mikaelsson, 2022). In fact, the numerous attempts of the researcher to ask whether there is an ontology behind this, particular to indigenous peoples, as the Rights of Nature movements commonly proclaim (see chapter 4.2) did not reverberate. Instead, what did become obvious in the conversation on Rights of Nature was that this is a topic where two ways of understanding meet — the researcher’s one shaped by the theoretical contemplating of these topics and the Sámi politician’s shaped by decades of struggle and reality. This required our conversation to take several returns to clarifications

¹⁷⁸ Eatnam; Sámi for Sámi land.

on terminology and points of view, creating a common ground from which a dialogue could take place. It would be an overstatement to claim that the researcher reached a thorough understanding, but this conversation did contribute to a general understanding that the Sámi people do not have the luxury to choose their political arguments according to their own ontologies.¹⁷⁹ Rather, a constant adaptation to the majority discourse takes place, shaped by adaptation and frustration. Adopting the UDRME was “*not a strategic choice*”, as this would imply that there is a choice as well as a strategy. Rather, it was “*the only thing left to the Sami people*”. It is in a similar tone that Mikaelsson talked about the four national parks and two protected areas that are designated in Swedish Sápmi. These sites of world and cultural heritage are “*another piece in the puzzle*” of making Sámi claims heard, given that “*our existence alone is not a reason enough to protect nature/people*”. The pattern that human-nature division is blurry is again reiterated.

Fieldwork Analysis:

The ethnographic observations during the fieldwork also gave various indications towards human-nature relationships. One observation is the omni-presence of the reindeer which was striking even before the fieldwork began. A phone call in advance disclosed that the reason why it was so difficult to arrange walks and talks with local people was that “*everybody is very busy with the reindeer*” (Fieldnotes, p. 1). This predominance of reindeer-related concerns stretched throughout the fieldwork like a constant variable, just like it is a constant for the livelihood of many Sámi people.¹⁸⁰

In addition, the personification of nature reoccurred during the ethnographic investigations. A conversation with a plant expert left the researcher with the impression that simple rights to nature would not reflect the agency of nature; the following quotes suggest that (1) trees can talk to us, that (2) animals have needs, that (3) flowers can be personified:

(1) “*When the trees are hanging down, when there is moss on the stones, they are telling us something; there is poison somewhere. It could be from the air, it could be from the soil.*”

¹⁷⁹ De la Cadena, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ Not of all Sámi people however, and the Swedish Reindeer herding law has done its part in creating a division between Sámi people that identify as reindeer herders and those that do not (Toivanen, 'European Fantasy of the Arctic Region', 2019; Kuhn, 2020).

(2) “*They have destroyed the earth. They destroyed it for all sorts of animals. There are animals who need it but they have not learned that.*”

(3) “*After the Lule River dam, suddenly you could see Angelica. She is a very important plant for us!*” (Fieldnotes, p. 5)

The framing of the protection of nature in responsibility-terms rather than in rights-terms reappeared at the Fridays for Future protest, where members of *Sáminuorra* held up a banner saying “STAND WITH THE GUARDIANS OF THE LAND. Respect Sámi Rights = Save Live” (Fieldnotes, p. 6). This is coherent with the suggestion of RoN that natural entities be represented in court by guardians.

In conclusion, it seems as though there is no ontology requiring to express the concerns against the Gállok mine in rights-terms. It is interesting, to say the least, how little rights (of humans and of nature) are mentioned once the research moved away from the theoretical level in order to come “down to earth”¹⁸¹.

6.3 Extractivism: Beyond the Mine

It has been argued throughout this study that extractivism poses a prevalent obstacle to the fulfilment of (human) rights and is, in virtue of its colonial legacy, of particular threat to indigenous peoples worldwide. This subchapter analyses how extractivism appears in the data, in order to comprehend what resource extraction means on the ground and to the people affected and how far the extent of it reaches. Whilst extractivism finds not many explicit mentions in the primary data, the patterns of *time*, *sustainability* and *interconnectedness* could be established and will be analysed in order to understand what extractivism means in the Gállok case.

Digital Activism Analysis:

Implicit references to extractivist practices were ample, using the language of resources, mines, forestry, hydropower and infrastructure, that are all part of the extractivist concept. Many of the activists’ social media posts focus on describing what the area in question entails, what and who it is home to and how important it is to the overall ecosystem. The series of social media posts under the Instagram account “@gruvfrittjokkmokk” tries to

¹⁸¹ Latour, 2018, p. 37.

answer questions such as “*What is Gállok? Is it just an area where the soil's minerals have to ascend for pathetic gain? Is it an area so devastated by forestry and hydropower that a mine would make no difference at the time of the devastation? No, Gállok is so much more. These are indispensable values.*” The answers describe a fragile but save-worthy ecosystem of which the value goes far beyond the obvious.

Frequent references are made to the previous extractivist interventions that the Gállok area was subject to and their (un)sustainability. One caption reads “*Foreign fortune seekers and all sorts of stockbrokers can make money at the expense of our living environment, our water and our food*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 16). Other statements suggest that the mine is motivated by the short-term gratification of a multinational company: “*It is not very wise to put one's trust in a British venture capital company as a guarantor of the municipal welfare assignment. History clearly shows the results of other one-off industries*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 28).¹⁸² Throughout the analysis, reindeer husbandry and tourism — both of which would be threatened by the Gállok mine — have been found to be frequently described as sustainable. In the vein of sustainability, the notion of future and past generations reappears, indicating that taking responsibility now would allow children and grandchildren to also live a self-sufficient life in the areas of Gállok and the Lule River.

Beyond the notion of sustainability, some findings take the analysis to the ontological status of extractivism. One comment on wild rosemary (“skvattram”¹⁸³ in Swedish, a flower characteristic to the northern forest) poses the question:

“will the earth be pulled out from under her? Will she be pulled up by her roots, so she will never bloom again along the lakeshore? The anxiety is trembling. Thoughts tremble, as Gállok's lands are in danger of trembling”. (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 34)

This description of the fate of the flower evokes the very ontological questions around extractivism, what is being extracted and what constitutes a resource: “*The air we breathe will be heavily polluted at least for the entire life of the mine, that is, an entire generation will be affected*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 2). This indicates that a mine in Gállok would extract much more than iron ore itself, the consequences would reach beyond the soil

¹⁸² Compare: LKAB, 2022.

¹⁸³ Skvattram is a low shrub with a white flower that grows in northern latitudes.

and beyond the site. Moreover, “*all exploitation activities destroy the traces of previous generations that exist in the land*” (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 25), implying that the land that is being extracted is neither empty nor disposable, but is filled with memories and traditions.

Interview Analysis:

The interview findings reverberate with the findings from the social media data. The conversation with Mikaelsson displayed how everything is linked, on a political as well as ecological level: the greed of the European market and Sámi rights, extractivism and the war against Ukraine, clearcutting and air temperature. The conversation also left no doubt that clear-cutting is a form of extractivism that the area around Jokkmokk is already subject to; to an extent that in certain areas, a lorry passes every eight minutes — “*it will be finished one day, at the cost of people, animals and biodiversity.*” On the notion of interconnectivity, he also pointed out that the planned extractivist site, the Gállok mine, is at risk of causing the dysfunction of previous hydro-extractivist sites at the Lule river.

Fieldwork Analysis:

Moving to the analysis of the ethnographic observations, the fieldwork contributed to a more thorough understanding of the extent of extractivism and the omnipresence of it in the Jokkmokk area. Seeing the sheer size of the Porsi Power Plant, for example, or witnessing the numerous trucks loaded with logs as well as industrial-sized extractor vehicles that pass on a regular basis, brought to apprehension the impact these interventions have. Many interactions with diverse individuals local to Jokkmokk would sooner or later evolve around the sacrifices the area already had to make for the purposes of extractive projects. Further, the researcher was told that at the speed at which trees are being cleared, there is no time for them to grow lichen, a funghi that is eaten by reindeer.

Another way that epitomised the extractive continuity Sápmi has been enduring was the slogan chosen by the Fridays for Future and Sáminuorra activists: “*Inga gruvor i våran jord. Sápmi är inget smörgåsbord.* [No mine on our soil. Sápmi is not a buffet table]” (Fieldnotes, p. 6). The choice of the smörgåsbord metaphor illustrates that there is actually not enough land in Sápmi for everybody to help themselves unconstrained.

In conclusion, a lot more is at stake than the actual site of the mine, which would evidently be destroyed should the Gállok mine become reality. On top of that, the air and water quality

of the entire area, the biodiversity, the livelihood of many Sámi people as well as intergenerational knowledge would be pulled out of the land.

7 Discussion

This discussion weaves the analysis of the primary and secondary data together with some of the key previous scholarship and the main theories. Following the structure of the three themes — human rights, Rights of Nature, extractivism — however, also using a dialogue that freely associates the points of intersection between primary and secondary data, literature review and theory.

7.1 On Human Rights: More than the Human

Considering the weight it has in theory, the theme of human rights is rather inconspicuous in the analysis of the activists' social media interactions as well as in the observations made during fieldwork at the protest and in casual conversations with local people.

It seems that the importance of the concept to the activists in Jokkmokk lies in its relevance for the international discourse; thus a human rights language is being used almost exclusively when they take the argument to the global level of the international human rights regime, in order to give leverage to the charges against the Swedish state. Whenever the local activists mention human rights in their social media posts, it is immediately followed by a subordinate clause on the integrity of human and nature. This gives reasons to believe that the concept of human rights does not fully reflect the ontology of the local people. On the basis of the analysis, it seems unreasonable to draw a hard line between humans and nature as this dichotomy is not a message the analysed data communicates (Mikaelsson, 2022; digital ethnographic notes, 2022, pp. 4 & 12). This blurring of the boundaries makes a pure human-rights-lens insufficient in order to both understand and counter the damage that extractive practices cause to the local people and nature alike.

As the ironic reference to the “human right to ride a helicopter around nature” in one of the social media posts has shown (digital ethnographic notes, 2022, p. 6), the importance of human rights needs to be seen in a much more nuanced way than to take their inherent good

for granted.¹⁸⁴ This analysis can be made sense of by summoning up how other authors establish that anthropocentric human rights are based on an ontology of the superiority of humans, which complicitly binds human rights with the logic of extractivism.¹⁸⁵

The analysed data suggests that colonialism is a framework which the local activists use much more in their appeal against the Gállok mine than the framework of human rights. The lack of human rights language in the analysed data can be made sense of through some of the suggestions of the theory; that human rights are by no means free of colonial baggage, neither in Latin America nor in North Sweden.¹⁸⁶ This could be what makes them not the framework of first choice in the local activism against the Gállok mine. The “inability of the state to take into account Sámi rights”¹⁸⁷, expressed by the Sámi Parliament, resonates with what Garzón identifies as the inherent coloniality of human rights for indigenous peoples. Another explanation of the ambivalence of human rights is through the lens of the indeterminacy of law — that human rights, like any law, can be used for a multitude of ends, not all of them being intrinsically well-intended.¹⁸⁸

From either lens, it makes sense that the activists choose a human rights language not as a way to express their own ontologies, but as a way to find common ground with the dominant powers. To conclude this part of the discussion, the interplay of different languages, strategies and ontologies around the Gállok conflict, correlates with Toivanen’s assertion that human rights “are not born out of a vacuum but also within the strongest interests of prevailing governments”¹⁸⁹.

7.2 On Rights of Nature: More than Rights

Between the discussion of the Rights of Nature theme and the human rights theme, there are parallels as well as differences.

Based on the way most mentions of human rights tend to be followed by a reference to the importance of nature, it would have been logical to assume that the Rights of Nature find more mentions in the data. However, this was not the case; to the contrary, claims to Rights

¹⁸⁴ Tănăsescu, 2022.

¹⁸⁵ Garzón, 2019; D. Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021); Viaene, 2022.

¹⁸⁶ Garzón, 2019.

¹⁸⁷ Sjajn and Österling, 2022.

¹⁸⁸ Koskenniemi, 1999; Shetty, 2018.

¹⁸⁹ Toivanen, 2019, p. 15.

of Nature are even less frequent than to human rights. Does this have to do with the coloniality of rights as a concept itself? That to those defending the land duties and responsibilities are more important than rights? This could be the case considering Mikaelsson's explanation that the choice of a rights language is usually motivated by the need to find an area of agreement.

In a similar vein to human rights, Rights of Nature appear to be used with the predominant aim to find common ground with power-holding decision-makers rather than RoN adequately translating a particular Sámi or indigenous world view. This, first and foremost, stands in stark contrast to the way the RoN ideology is brought forward by many of its advocates.¹⁹⁰ A minority of scholars calls for caution in bringing forward claims of Rights of Nature being deeply rooted in indigenous belief systems.¹⁹¹ This caution shows to be all the more important after the analysis of the diverse data. Combining this with Stefan Mikaelsson's insisting that bringing the Sámi peoples' claims forward as a human rights issue, bringing them forward as a Rights of Nature issue, bringing them forward as a conservation issue has only ever been about using the few tools left at their disposal in order to find common ground with the oppressor, rather than out of a full-hearted conviction to the truth of these doctrines. Thus, not only does a lens that is critical to human rights and Rights of Nature explain the gaps in the data where these themes have not appeared, but also does it explain the precise moments in which these themes do appear.

The notion of the Sámi people as the "guardians of the land" (Fieldnotes, p. 6) prompts another rights-related issue that tends to be met with blissful unawareness. Based on the premise that indigenous peoples are among the best protectors of the environment, it would only be beneficial to strengthen their right to self-determination. This demand is anchored in the relevant international rights instruments such as the ILO169 and the UNDRIP. Thus, the advocacy for the Rights of Nature all too easily circumnavigates the controversial topic of self-determination, which would come with much more concessions than another rights-regime.

It is remarkable that despite the Sámi Parliament endorsing a Rights of Nature Declaration, these play little to no role in the discourse around the Gállok mine. This might be in part due to their lesser establishment in the international legal landscape, but it might also indicate

¹⁹⁰ Boyd, 2017; GARN, 2022; CELDF, 2022; ELC, 2022.

¹⁹¹ Viaene, 2022; Gilbert, *To be published. Sept. 2022.*

that a RoN framework does not reflect indigenous ontologies as much as they claim to. What seemed to matter heavily to many of the voices consulted in the data collection was the ontology of nature as a person, an agent. This, in turn, is something that a RoN falls short of reflecting. A RoN approach cannot reflect the agency of nature to an extent that it has the capacity to get angry, sad or hurt, let alone does it allow for the possibility that natural elements have interests that go beyond those of human beings.¹⁹²

However, the finding that the local population appeals to a personification of nature should be treated with care, too; to repeat what Viaene establishes, there are certain “risks and pitfalls of codifying and essentializing indigenous culture”¹⁹³. It is important to not regard the possible ontologies that underlie these statements as carved in stone, given that indigenous norms are based on the close relationship with the (ever-changing) territory, on oral histories and on cultural traditions.¹⁹⁴ Besides, as the amount of data this analysis draws on is small compared to the vastness of the Sámi culture and history, the “simplification and strategic essentializing” of these statements would be inadequate.¹⁹⁵ To bring this discussion point back to the theory chapter, the RoN concept ought not to be glorified and praised as inherently indigenous; this is what has been pointed out in the work of scholars from the Global South in the eyes of whom rights themselves have long been a tool to justify colonial oppression.¹⁹⁶

From the viewpoint of the data analysed, the international norm production and practice of RoN ought to be accompanied by a critical discourse that ensures “that indigenous communities are taking the lead in these claims of granting rights to nature.”¹⁹⁷. The act of mediating that the interview with Mikaelsson occasionally required exemplifies the importance of dialogue in order for the Western-minded RoN advocates not to talk past or over indigenous concerns.

7.3 On Extractivism: the Fallacy of the Smörgåsbord

Much of the theory on extractivism begs the question of what it is that is being extracted. The ontological implications of the personification of nature in the data analysed seem to

¹⁹² Viaene, 2022.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*; Gilbert, *To be published. Sept. 2022*.

¹⁹⁵ Spivak, 1998; Viaene, 2022., p. 13.

¹⁹⁶ Barreto, 2018; Garzón, 2019.

¹⁹⁷ Viaene, 2022, p. 16.

suggest that much of what is at stake in Gállok goes beyond iron ore, but also far beyond the actual site of the mine, forest, river. In the analysis, this has become evident with the repeated reference to logging and hydropower, even in the context of the proposed mine: the frequent reference to previous interventions stretches through all data. This is important as a narrow interpretation of extractivism, taking into account only its most glaring forms (i.e. mining), can lead to the assumption that the area around Gállok has so far been spared from extractive interventions. A false premise of “untouchedness” is oblivious to the suffering that has previously been caused. The apparent urge to point out past interventions indicates an ontological discrepancy between the government’s understanding of extractivism and the local peoples’ experience of it.

This divergence in ontologies of extractivism also manifests itself in the pattern of interdependence; removing one form of natural resource in a given place has an effect on all sorts of other variables, which are not mentioned in the mainstream discourse on mining.

This leads further to the point of sustainability and the short-sightedness is attributed to the decision-makers of the Gállok mine. Shielding these practices under the disguise of the green transition is oblivious to the lived experience of the Sámi people and of Sápmi, the place, where extractivism is a violent form of human dominance. Based on the phenomenon that the knowledge and existence of human rights is not enough to prevent extractivist-caused human rights violations, it seems reasonable to suppose that the human rights regime is only a fellow passenger of, but complicit with the neoliberal and colonial logic of extractivism.¹⁹⁸ Some of two parallel threads of (1) the legal subordination of indigenous peoples (*and* nature) and (2) hegemonic logic of extracting from the assumed “periphery” to the assumed “centre” can be identified in the experience of the Sámi peoples’ experience of extractivist interventions on their land.¹⁹⁹ The metaphor of the *Smörgåsbord* epitomises this unequal relationship between the Swedish state and Sápmi; inclining Sámi people to feel that their land is providing for the greed of others. With *smörgåsbord* being a common Swedish reference, the choice of the metaphor can be understood in broader terms as an attempt of the Sámi people to make themselves understood to a society which, in the words of Klein, is inherently extractive, pointing out that in the case of Sápmi, there is *not* enough for everybody to help themselves and that the imagination of Sápmi as a *smörgåsbord* is based

¹⁹⁸ Chakrabarty, 2021; Tănăsescu, 2022.

¹⁹⁹ Acosta, 2013.

on a fallacy.²⁰⁰ Klein's understanding of "sacrifice-zones" helps make sense of the clash of ontologies at stake: the extractor does not see the value beyond economic terms, while the local people fear the complete exhaustion of their land.²⁰¹

In sum, the findings of the analysis call for a more comprehensive understanding of extractivism in terms of its *explicit physical extent* (impacting humans, flowers, mountains, rivers, forest, air, climate). This understanding provides a more wholistic view on the scope of reach of extractivist projects, such as the Gállok mine. Moreover, the analysis has provided reasons to believe that the *implicit political significance* of extractivism too, with its suggestion that Sápmi is available for everybody to take from, is all-encompassing, stretching even through concepts like human rights and Rights of Nature.

8 Conclusions

The overarching question of this thesis is twofold: in a first step it asked what the ontological premises of human rights and Rights of Nature are, in a second step it to interrogated their respective potential to mitigate the effects of extractivism in Sápmi.

Three main findings from the digital ethnography and the fieldwork enlighten this interrogation: (1) the divide between humans and nature is blurry (2) in the Gállok conflict, rights language is first and foremost an instrument, (3) coloniality matters to the people in Sápmi. In the following three paragraphs these will be dissected respectively.

The social media analysis as well as the interview and the ethnographically inspired fieldwork have indicated that to the people in Sápmi, certainly for those protesting against the Gállok mine, the lines between humans and nature are blurry. This is exemplified through the personification of nature that stretched through the social media analysis, the analysis of the interview as well as the ethnographic fieldnotes. Many of the Sámi activists' social media interactions referred to the nature around Gállok in almost-human terms, attributing agency, gender, memory and feelings to natural objects such as flowers (i.e. the *ffällnejlika* or the *skvattram*, emblematic for the landscape in Sápmi), the river Lule and its shores. Attributing a memory to nature further illustrates how intertwined Sámi heritage and the landscape are.

²⁰⁰ Klein, 2015.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

The interview revealed how it makes little sense to look at nature and humans separately in the Gállok case because of the dependence of the local people on their land and due to the ruptures a mine would signify to life in the area altogether, for humans and nonhumans alike. During fieldwork, this personification of nature arose in conversation with a Sámi elder describing how trees have their way of talking to the world around them in order to indicate environmental pollution.

These empirical findings add a layer to the theoretical contemplations. The premise of progress through extractivism is reliant on a strict human-nature dichotomy that does not seem to match the lived experience of the people in and around Gállok.

In turn, the human rights regime, too, tends to rely on a human-nature dichotomy, which brings us to the second finding; it seems as though the opponents of the Gállok mine choose a rights language (of humans and of nature) first and foremost chosen as an instrument rather than as something that reflects the local ontologies. As the analysis of the social media shows, the activists only very occasionally mention rights, and only in strategic moments when they are linked to the international discourse. On the ground, what seems to matter significantly more than human rights and Rights of Nature are the responsibilities and duties humans have towards nature, which is at odds with some of the human rights framing of the right *to* nature. The interview asserted that including the endorsement of the UDRME is more characteristic of an attempt to get the Sámi peoples' claims heard, than an adequate translation of their ontologies. To the protestors against the Gállok mine, the *responsibility* towards nature rather than the human right *to* it or the rights *of* it appear to matter much more. Tying this to the theoretical part of this study, the language of rights seems to be unable to mitigate the extractivist features of contemporary societies.²⁰² This inherent extractivism is manifested in the idea that progress requires sacrifice zones and the conflict in Gállok centres precisely around different visions whether it is such a zone or not. A language of responsibilities and duties towards nature thus might be better equipped to treat the extractivist syndrome and its effects on humans and nature, than on a language of rights.

The third key finding from the digital ethnography and the fieldwork is the repeated reference the activists in Gállok are making to coloniality. While the language of coloniality is much more prominent in the social media activism than that of human rights or Rights of

²⁰² Klein, 2015.

Nature, it also came up much more organically during fieldwork and the interview than the other themes. The *smörgåsbord* metaphor chosen at a protest is indicative of the impression of the local people that Sápmi is to the dominant powers nothing but a sacrifice zone. Reflecting on this through the decolonial lens, the right that is equipped to counter the *smörgåsbord* illusion is the right to self-determination, which would allow the Sámi people the control over their land. In both human rights and RoN, the right to self-determination is not at the forefront of attention. Given the coloniality out of which rights are born, it is the right to self-determination that would actually decolonise human rights in Sápmi. Equally, the right to self-determination might be the human right best equipped to mitigate the effects of extractivism in Sápmi. This is also why it is important that Rights of Nature take on this aspect, in order to not leave indigenous peoples behind.

In sum, on the basis of this study, it can thus be concluded that neither human rights nor RoN can counter the human-nature dichotomy that does not adequately reflect local ontologies in the Gállok conflict. Hence, neither of these frameworks seem to be able to adequately address the ills of extractivism alone and can only to a limited extent mitigate its effects on Sápmi. The choice of a RoN language by the Sámi Parliament can be understood as an attempt at dialogue rather than as an adequate reflection of Sámi-particular ontologies. These observations give rise to the conclusion that what is needed in the dominant human rights and RoN ontology is an awareness of the responsibilities and duties that mutually involve humans and nature. Moreover, in order to be a tool of decolonisation, RoN needs to take the indigenous peoples' right to self-determination seriously.

So far, these tentative conclusions might apply to the case of the Gállok mine and the actors at stake, but its generalisability beyond the context remains limited. Further insight into these findings would be generated through more extended fieldwork, in order to deepen the dialogue between Euro-centric assumptions (on human rights, RoN and extractivism) and the lived experience of the people fighting against their land being treated as a buffet replete with open sandwiches, a *smörgåsbord*.

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