

Coexistence or (green) colonialism?

A narrative analysis of the disputed mining project in
Rönnbäcken

Tilda Andersson

Abstract

Increasing demands for the green transition have created an ethical dilemma: How can the extraction of critical minerals be combined with protection of Indigenous rights and local ecosystems? Is it even possible to find solutions to the conflicts that emerge in “green” energy projects? Contributing to these debates, this thesis set out to answer the following question: *How can we understand pro- and anti-mining narratives adopted in the mining project in Rönnbäcken (2013-2024) from a postcolonial-ecocritical perspective?* By conducting a narrative analysis of newspaper articles and other text sources, this thesis found that pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken were largely centered around ideas of extractive exceptionalism, green growth and, to a lesser extent, environmental justice. Anti-mining narratives, on the other hand, were mainly rooted in ideas of environmental justice, and to some extent also human-nonhuman interdependency. These narratives were further understood as sites of colonial and anthropocentric power and resistance. The findings indicate that the conflict in Rönnbäcken concerns fundamental differences in how Rönnbäcken, both the area and the project, is ought to be interpreted. Any attempt to find solutions to the conflicts must thus first address these differences, as well as the power relations embedded in the conflict.

Key words: postcolonial ecocriticism, narrative analysis, power, green transition, Sámi rights

Words: 19 482

Table of contents

List of abbreviations	5
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Purpose and research question	2
1.2 Relevance	2
1.3 Background	3
1.3.1 Swedish colonization and mining in Sápmi	3
1.3.2 The mining project in Rönnbäcken	5
2 Literature review	8
2.1 The green energy dilemma and the importance of a just transition	8
2.2 Resource extraction in Sápmi: Sámi rights, colonization and environmental impacts	8
2.3 Narratives in extractive projects.....	10
2.4 The mining project in Rönnbäcken	11
2.5 Summary: identifying a research gap.....	11
3 Theoretical framework.....	12
3.1 Postcolonial ecocriticism.....	12
3.1.1 Power.....	14
3.2 Analytical framework: narratives.....	17
3.2.1 Green growth.....	17
3.2.2 Extractive exceptionalism	18
3.2.3 Environmental justice.....	19
3.2.4 Human-nonhuman interdependency	20
4 Methodology	22
4.1 Narrative analysis.....	22
4.1.1 What is narrative analysis?.....	22
4.1.2 Why study narratives?.....	23
4.1.3 How to study narratives in the Rönnbäcken case?.....	24
4.2 Material	25
4.3 Operationalization	28
4.4 Ethical considerations	30
4.5 Challenges and limitations	31
5 Analysis: narratives in the Rönnbäcken mining project (2013-2024).....	33

5.1	Pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken.....	33
5.1.1	Extractive exceptionalism	33
5.1.2	Green growth.....	37
5.1.3	Environmental justice.....	39
5.2	Anti-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken	40
5.2.1	Environmental justice.....	40
5.2.2	Human-nonhuman interdependency	46
5.3	Power and resistance in Rönnbäcken	49
5.3.1	Power relations between the Sámi people and the Swedish mining industry 49	
5.3.2	Power relations between non-humans and humans.....	51
6	Concluding discussion	53
7	Literature list.....	55
7.1	Material	61
	Appendix I: Overview of the material (SVT Nyheter)	64
	Appendix II: Translated quotes (original).....	66
	Pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken	66
	Extractive exceptionalism.....	66
	Green growth	68
	Environmental justice	68
	Anti-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken.....	69
	Environmental justice	69
	Human-nonhuman interdependency	71

List of abbreviations

CERD	The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
EU	European Union
ICERD	The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
SGR	Stoppa gruvan i Rönnbäck / Stop Rönnbäck nickel mining project
SGU	Sveriges geologiska undersökning / Geological Survey of Sweden
SSR	Svenska Samernas Riksförbund
UN	United Nations

1 Introduction

The nickel mining project in Rönnebäcken, located outside of Tärnaby in the Storuman municipality, has been disputed for over a decade. Critics point to the potentially devastating impacts on the local environment and reindeer pasture lands that the Vapsten reindeer herding community¹ depend upon. While both mining and reindeer husbandry are public interests, the Swedish government declared in 2013 that mining should be prioritized in the Rönnebäcken case, which sparked protests by Sámi communities and environmental organizations. In 2020, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) urged the government to withdraw the permit and revise Swedish mining laws to better protect Sámi rights in mining processes. Despite international criticism, the project has not been suspended. Increased nickel prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as growing demands for electrification have instead led to renewed interest in the project (Kejerhag 2022).

The Rönnebäcken case illustrates the ethical dilemma that tend to emerge in green energy projects, namely whether it is justifiable to extract critical minerals, which the green transition requires, at the expense of local livelihoods and ecosystems (Köppel & Scoville-Simonds 2024: 1). Different, yet all desirable, political goals – climate adaptation and the protection of Indigenous rights and ecosystems – seem to be pitted against each other in the Rönnebäcken case. Is it possible to achieve all these goals or is it necessary to prioritize some values over others? Are the different goals inherently incompatible or can they be reconciled?

To find answers to these questions, it is necessary to examine the underlying ideas in the conflicts related to green energy projects. Some argue, for instance, that mining conflicts concern more than merely the issue of mining itself, as they relate to fundamental ideas about human-nature relations (Beland Lindahl et al. 2018). Others suggest that contested renewable energy projects are embedded in colonial relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (e.g. Lawrence 2014; Fjellheim 2023; Dunlap 2018). As such, while many agree that all these goals are desirable, different understandings of (green) resource extraction may obstruct the attempts to find solutions to these conflicts.

¹ *Sameby*. Reindeer herding communities are economic and administrative units in geographical areas where reindeer husbandry is carried out (Sámi Parliament 2022). Members of the reindeer herding communities “have a right to herd reindeer (an exclusive right for the Sami people in Sweden) and specific Sami hunting and fishing rights, while non-members do not enjoy any of these rights” (Lawrence & Mörkenstam 2016: 109).

1.1 Purpose and research question

This thesis aims to contribute to the discussion on the green transition dilemma by critically examining the narratives used in the contested mining project in Rönnbäcken through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism. By analyzing these narratives, and potential tensions between them, my ambition is to contribute to a better understanding of the complexities involved in (potentially) intractable resource conflicts. The following research question will be discussed:

How can we understand pro- and anti-mining narratives adopted in the mining project in Rönnbäcken (2013-2024) from a postcolonial-ecocritical perspective?

In addition, two secondary research questions will guide the analysis:

- 1. What narratives are adopted by pro- and anti-mining actors in the Rönnbäcken case?*
- 2. What can the narratives reveal about how colonial and anthropocentric power relations are upheld and resisted?*

The analysis will cover narratives used in Rönnbäcken between 2013-2024. A longer time period facilitates the process to identify narratives, as key messages are believed to be repeated over time. The length of the time period is also deemed necessary to collect the sufficient amount of data needed for the analysis. Further, this thesis acknowledges the importance to consider both climate, Indigenous and environmental dimensions in green energy projects, which motivates the use of a postcolonial-ecocritical perspective. The theoretical approach is believed to be appropriate to capture all these elements without reducing one to another. It should also be noted that the legal aspects of the Rönnbäcken case will not be commented on. However, much of the material refers to the legal dimensions in various ways. Some brief descriptions of the legal case will thus be included to provide context to the analysis.

1.2 Relevance

The issue examined in this thesis is widely relevant, mainly because of the urgency of the climate crisis. The need to speed up the transition to renewable energy sources to end the global dependence on fossil fuels has been increasingly recognized by global actors (UNFCCC 2024). The green transition requires the extraction of critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt (Pitron 2022: 136-137) and nickel (Everljung 2021a), but the extraction of these minerals have sparked resistance across the globe. The extraction of critical minerals involves highly

environmentally damaging activities and often harm Indigenous cultures, for example due to lack of free, prior and informed consent and failures to consult affected Indigenous communities (Finn & Stanton 2022: 343-344). There are many examples of Indigenous communities bearing a disproportionate burden for the green transition (Amber et al. 2023: 1), particularly since extractive activities tend to be located on Indigenous lands (Persson et al. 2017: 20-21). The importance of a *just transition* – the idea that both costs and benefits of the green energy transition should be proportionately shared based on principles of social justice – is therefore also increasingly emphasized in the green transition debate (Amber et al. 2023: 1).

Furthermore, the Rönnbäcken project is only one of many contested green energy projects in Sápmi (other examples are for instance the Fosen wind energy project and the mining project in Gállok, see e.g. Karam & Shokrgozar 2023; Persson et al. 2017). In particular, mining projects have increased in Sápmi in recent years, which has fueled debates about Sámi land rights and self-determination across Sápmi. Mining and other extractive activities, and their impacts on Sámi rights and livelihoods, are among the most pressing issues in Sápmi today (Ojala & Nordin 2015: 6), which further illustrates the relevance of this thesis. These issues will also likely become more relevant as Sweden and the EU strive to reduce their dependence on China and other countries for the extraction of critical minerals (Pitron 2022), while failing to properly consider Indigenous rights in mineral legislations (Amnesty International 2023). As such, new extractive projects and conflicts are likely to emerge across Sápmi and beyond. The issue is therefore of great importance on local, national and global levels.

1.3 Background

1.3.1 Swedish colonization and mining in Sápmi

The Sápmi region – located within the borders of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia – is home to the Sámi people, the only Indigenous people in Europe (SI 2). Sápmi is both a geographical region and a cultural and linguistic community (Sámi Parliament 2024), which reflects the Sámi culture's intimate ties to its traditional territories (Lawrence & Åhrén² 2016: 149). Traditional Sámi

² The article is co-authored by Mattias Åhrén, a professor in international law, Indigenous rights law, and Sámi law. It should be noted that he also is the head of the Human Rights Unit of the Saami Council and represented the Vapsten reindeer herding community in the individual complaint to CERD (CERD 2020). He is therefore

livelihoods largely depend on local ecosystems, and include for instance reindeer husbandry, small-scale hunting, fishing (SI 1), small-scale family forestry and handicraft manufacturing. While Sámi people also engage in non-traditional economic activities, Sámi culture and economy rely on traditional practices to a large extent (Koivurova et al. 2015: 12). Semi-nomadic reindeer husbandry, in particular, has central importance in Sámi culture, both as a livelihood and as a cultural practice (SI 2).

Sápmi has for centuries been exploited and colonized by various state authorities. Swedish colonial policies in Sápmi have historically involved, for example, forced displacements, the prohibition of Sámi cultural practices (Össbo 2020: 430, 435) and dispossession of traditional lands (Lawrence & Åhrén 2016: 149). While Swedish colonization in Sápmi has long historical roots, the Swedish authorities' interest in the region increased significantly first in the 15th and 16th centuries. The discovery of silver ore in the 1630s (Lindmark 2013: 131) further increased the colonization attempts and contributed to the development of Swedish settler colonialism in Sápmi. Silver extraction required permanent residents that could manage the silver transportations. Consequently, the Swedish state adopted two royal decrees³ in 1673 and 1695 to facilitate non-Sámi settlements and guarantee long-term access to natural resources in Sápmi. The royal decrees were underpinned by the idea that Sámi communities and settlers could coexist since they pursued different economic activities. According to Össbo, similar ideas remain in contemporary extraction projects in Sápmi (2020: 425-426).

As such, one of the main purposes of Swedish colonization was early on to guarantee the access to natural resources in Sápmi (Lindmark 2013: 131), and resource extraction has historically been supported by colonial ideas that justify the Swedish state treating Sápmi and the Sámi people as assets (Ojala & Nordin 2015: 11). The Swedish authorities' policies in Sápmi continue to be centered around resource extraction (Össbo 2020: 442) and many thus argue that contemporary mining activities in Sápmi must be understood in the historical context of colonization. According to Lawrence and Åhrén, for instance, “mining has held, and continues to hold, a particular significance in both Sweden's political economy and its colonial imaginary” (2016: 151).

Despite the historical exploitation and domination of Sápmi, Swedish interventions in Sápmi are rarely regarded as colonization in Swedish imaginaries. The knowledge and public awareness of the colonial history is also limited among Sweden's non-Sámi population (Ojala & Nordin 2015: 10), and Sápmi is commonly viewed as a Swedish territory rather than an Indigenous cultural and geographical region (Lindmark 2013: 132). The highly outdated “saltwater

involved in the Rönnebäcken case and participates in the construction of the anti-mining narratives. This fact does not reduce the credibility of the article, but should be kept in mind by the reader.

³ *Lappmarksplakaten*.

theory” has largely shaped Swedish understandings of its colonial history, which claims that colonization only occurs in distant territories and not within the borders of the colonizer state. From this largely ahistorical perspective, Swedish advancements in Sápmi are not to be regarded as colonization as it differs from “traditional” forms of (European) colonization (Lawrence & Åhrén 2016: 149-151). As such, the Swedish state continues to overlook the colonial legacies embedded in its relations to the Sámi people (Ojala & Nordin 2015: 10).

For these reasons, mining in Sápmi is rarely viewed as a colonial practice in Swedish imaginaries (de Leeuw 2023: 72). However, as shown above, mining has been central in the historical colonization of Sápmi. Mining practices also continue to harm Sámi communities. For instance, as argued by Lawrence and Åhrén, neither the Swedish mining industry nor state authorities have sufficiently considered Indigenous rights in corporate policies and mining laws (2016: 152). Consequently, many Sámi politicians and protesters view mining in Sápmi as a continuation of historical colonial processes that fails to recognize and protect Sámi rights (Ojala & Nordin 2015: 7).

1.3.2 The mining project in Rönnbäcken

The nickel mining project in Rönnbäcken involves open-pit mining activities at three locations: Rönnbäcksnäset, Sundsberget and Vinberget located outside of Tärnaby in the Storuman municipality (Kejerhag 2022). The project is currently operated by Bluelake Mineral⁴, a Swedish company focused on mining exploration and development in the Nordic countries (Bluelake Mineral 2024a). The company was granted the exploitation concession (the permit required to exploit mineral deposits) in 2010 for Rönnbäcksnäset and Vinberget, and in 2012 for Sundsberget. The exploitation concession gives the company the right to exploit the area for 25 years. The mine is expected to be in operation for 20 years. Mainly nickel will be extracted, but there is also an ambition to extract cobalt and iron (Kejerhag 2022). Rönnbäcken is the largest known undeveloped nickel deposit in Europe, and the company estimates that the Rönnbäcken project will generate “a production of 23,000 tonnes of nickel, 660 tonnes of cobalt and 1.5 million tonnes of iron per year for 20 years” (Bluelake Mineral 2024b).

The Rönnbäcken project has been widely criticized because of the negative effects it will have on reindeer husbandry and the local environment. Various Sámi organizations and environmental groups have criticized the project, such as the Saami Council (e.g. Saami Council 2021a), Naturskyddsföreningen and

⁴ Bluelake Mineral was previously named Nickel Mountain. The company will only be referred to as Bluelake Mineral or “the company” in this thesis to remain consistent and avoid confusion (original names are included in Table 1).

Greenpeace. Several local actors and communities have also voiced their concern, including the network “Stoppa gruvan i Rönnbäck” (Stop Rönnbäck nickel mining project, SGR) (Naturskyddsföreningen 2015) and the Vapsten reindeer herding community. Critics argue that a mine in Rönnbäcken will destroy important reindeer pasture lands (SVT Nyheter 2013f) and seriously damage local ecosystems. Rönnbäcken holds great ecological values with its old forests and high levels of biodiversity. For this reason, the County Administrative Board initiated plans already in 2003 to increase the environmental protection of the area by turning it into a nature reserve (Johansson 2013). The ecological values have also been shown in various environmental inventories: Bluelake Mineral’s inventory identified nine endangered species, and environmental organizations found 35 endangered species (SVT Nyheter 2014a) and 65 vulnerable species in the area (Frygell & Lindahl 2014).

Despite the criticism raised by various organizations and local communities, the Swedish government approved the project in 2013. Following this decision, the Saami Council and the Vapsten reindeer herding community filed an individual complaint to CERD (SVT Nyheter 2013f). Shortly after, CERD urged the Swedish government to cancel all mining activities in Rönnbäcken (Müller & Frygell 2013). In 2014, the Swedish Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the government had sufficiently considered potential negative impacts on reindeer herding and the environment (SVT Nyheter 2014b). In CERD’s verdict in 2020, it once again stated that Sweden must increase the recognition and protection of traditional Sámi land rights in national mineral legislations (CERD 2020: 12), and recommended Sweden to “provide an effective remedy to the Vapsten Sami reindeer herding community by effectively revising the mining concessions after an adequate process of free, prior and informed consent” (ibid: 16).

The project has not been suspended despite these criticisms and repeated requests from CERD to withdraw the permit. In 2015, Bluelake Mineral announced that the Rönnbäcken project had been cancelled due to low nickel prices and high mining costs, but the exploitation concession remains until 2037 (Beland Lindahl et al. 2016: 12). In 2021, the project was reactivated to a rise in the global nickel prices (Everljug 2021a). Recent findings have also shown that Rönnbäcken contains the largest cobalt deposit in Sweden, which has further increased the interest in the project (Everljug 2023). However, Bluelake Mineral’s CEO Peter Hjorth estimated in 2021 that it will take approximately five to six years before mining activities can be initiated (Everljug 2021a).

2003	The County Administrative Board initiated plans to establish a nature reserve in Rönnbäcken.
2005	IGE Resources (Nickel Mountain) received exploration rights in the Rönnbäcken area.
2010	Exploitation concession granted for Rönnbäcksnäset and Vinberget.

2012	Exploitation concession granted for Sundsberget.
2013	The Swedish government declared that the public interest for mining in Rönnbäcken is greater than the public interest for reindeer husbandry. The Vapsten reindeer herding community and the Saami Council filed an individual complaint to CERD. CERD urged the Swedish government to cancel all mining activities in Rönnbäcken.
2014	The Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the government's assessment of the Rönnbäcken mine was sufficient and that potential negative impacts on reindeer herding and the environment were considered.
2015	The Rönnbäcken project was canceled due to low nickel prices and high mining costs.
2020	The individual complaint was finalized and CERD once again requested Sweden to increase the recognition and protection of traditional Sámi land rights in national legislation, and to cancel the mining concessions in Rönnbäcken. (Nickel Mountain changed name to Bluelake Mineral.)
2021	Bluelake Mineral announced that they will reactivate the project due to a rise in global nickel prices.

Table 1: The mining project in Rönnbäcken – timeline

2 Literature review

2.1 The green energy dilemma and the importance of a just transition

While much research emphasizes the importance of the green energy transition, many scholars also highlight the negative social and environmental effects of “green” projects (e.g. Agusdinata et al. 2018; Zhou & Brown 2024). The dilemma of the green transition – that the resource extraction necessary for green technologies cause environmental and social harms locally – are discussed by several authors (e.g. Köppel & Scoville-Simonds 2024; Finn & Stanton 2022) as well as the tensions and conflicts that emerge in “green” extractive projects (e.g. Ciplet & Harrison 2020; Fernandes 2024). Many of these researchers are also increasingly arguing for the need for a just transition. For instance, Newell et al. (2022) shed light on the tensions associated with the green transition and illuminate the need for scholars to better consider trade-offs and tensions in these projects to improve the prospects for a just transition.

The importance of incorporating Indigenous perspectives in just transition debates is also discussed by many researchers. Finn and Stanton, for example, assert that “there *must* be a focus on the people located where these transition minerals are mined” to achieve “a true just transition” that supports Indigenous rights (2022: 375-376, emphasis in original). Similarly, Amber et al. argue that mainstream research on the green transition and climate change “rarely focuses on values that undergird solutions from people that must live with the solutions” (2023: 2). Instead, what is needed is a better incorporation of Indigenous perspectives in climate and green energy research that better acknowledges relations between humans and non-humans (ibid). Furthermore, the emerging field of Indigenous climate change studies further illustrate the increased interest among scholars to better include Indigenous memories, experiences and knowledges in climate-related research (Whyte 2017).

2.2 Resource extraction in Sápmi: Sámi rights, colonization and environmental impacts

There seems to be an increasing number of articles that analyze the links between Sámi rights and resource extraction. Much of the literature emphasizes institutional, legislative, and regulatory flaws and inequalities that negatively impact Sámi rights in extractive projects, particularly in mining projects (e.g. Koivurova et al. 2015; Raitio et al. 2020). Tarras-Wahlberg and Southalan (2022), for example, argue that mining processes do not properly consider potential social and cultural damages caused by mining, and some form of legislative change is thus required. Many researchers also argue that “Sami rights claims are either ignored, or simply denied” in mining processes (Lawrence & Kløcker Larsen 2017: 1175), and justice issues are thus rarely addressed (Kløcker Larsen et al. 2022: 9). Some authors also highlight the repeated international criticisms of Sweden’s treatment of the Sámi people and the lack of recognition and implementation of Sámi rights (e.g. Lawrence & Åhrén 2016).

Furthermore, extractive projects are often understood as more or less interlinked with historical processes of colonization. Scholars argue, for instance, that disputed wind power projects in Sápmi must be understood in terms of (internal) colonization (e.g. Lawrence 2014; Össbo 2023), and that mining on Sámi lands must be recognized as a colonial practice (e.g. Lawrence & Åhrén 2016; Persson et al. 2017; de Leeuw 2023). Furthermore, Kløcker Larsen et al. suggest that colonial exploitation “is still ongoing and, potentially, in an even more aggressive form, due to escalated resource demand and speed enabled with the bureaucratic technologies of dispossession” (2022: 9).

However, further research that analyzes contemporary relations between the Sámi people and state authorities through postcolonial perspectives is needed, which has been argued by both scholars and Sámi representatives (Lawrence 2014: 1039). This is particularly important since there is a tendency to overlook colonial legacies in Swedish imaginaries, as discussed in the previous chapter. While researchers are increasingly applying postcolonial perspectives to analyze resource extraction in Sápmi, Swedish and Nordic colonization in Sápmi has been virtually unaddressed in academia for decades (Ojala 2023: 576). As such, it is vital to consider how conflicts in extractive projects in Sápmi are rooted in the colonial history (Ojala & Nordin 2015: 6). Further research can also contribute to better understandings of the complex dynamics involved in conflicts between corporations and Indigenous communities and other local groups (Persson et al. 2017: 20).

The previous literature on resource extraction in Sápmi is focused on how extractive projects negatively impact Sámi culture and livelihoods to a large extent, but they also shed light on the environmental impacts caused by resource extraction. However, environmental concerns are mostly discussed in relation to Sámi rights. This is not surprising as Sámi culture is intimately tied to its lands and traditional livelihoods (Henriksen 2008: 28), and it is difficult to treat Sámi rights and environmental concerns as two separate issues. Few researchers, however, sufficiently consider the clashes between extractive interests and

environmental values in Sápmi. In particular, few researchers pay attention to debates about “human-nature” relations and rarely reflect on taken-for-granted notions of “the environment”. Thus, there is generally a lack of ecocritical perspectives.

2.3 Narratives in extractive projects

Previous literature also demonstrates the importance of narratives and discourses in disputed extractive projects across the globe. Strambo and González Espinosa (2020), for instance, illustrate how narratives and counter-narratives deployed by state and non-state actors both legitimize and challenge fossil fuel production in Colombia. The Colombian government adopts the view that economic development requires fossil fuel extraction, which effectively hinders the attempts to reduce the fossil fuel dependency. Another example is how lithium mining and soy agribusiness in Argentina is legitimized in terms of climate protection and green extractivism: “large-scale resource extraction is not only proposed as being compatible, but rather framed as a necessity to deal with climate change” (Dorn et al. 2022: 1). As such, the depletion of social-ecological values is further legitimized, and efforts to achieve a transition towards sustainability are hampered (ibid: 8). These articles thus illustrate the importance of narratives in both the justification and contestation of extractive policies and projects.

The importance of narratives has also been illustrated to some extent in disputed extractive projects in Sápmi. Lawrence, for instance, argues that the idea that Sámi interests must “give way to broader environmental concerns” (2014: 1049) is embedded in renewable energy discourses, and Sámi interests are therefore often excluded in renewable energy debates (ibid). Moreover, there are some scholars that demonstrate how narratives and other discursive practices are used to both promote and challenge extractive activities in Sápmi (e.g. Bergman Rosamond 2020; de Leeuw 2023; Lawrence & Moritz 2019). Many of these articles indicate that extractive projects in Sápmi are rooted in “different knowledge systems” and perceptions of, for instance, what “Saami reindeer herding is an[d] ought to be” (Fjellheim 2023: 140). However, as stated above, many authors still mainly highlight institutional and legislative dimensions, and narratives and other discursive practices are arguably not sufficiently considered.

Furthermore, some authors consider environmental dimensions in narratives. Lalander and Merimaa (2018), for example, discuss how environmental and ecological concerns are “perceived, defined and expressed” in competing narratives in environmental struggles in Ecuador. However, the environmental aspects of extractive projects are often overlooked, and ecocritical perspectives and critical reflections of terminology such as “nature” and “the environment” are largely absent in the literature.

2.4 The mining project in Rönnbäcken

Despite the increasing interest in Sámi rights and extractive industries, and the many examples of extractive conflicts across Sápmi, scholars have predominantly focused on the Gállok mining conflict (e.g. Persson et al. 2017; de Leeuw 2023; Wilson & Allard 2023). The widespread interest in the Gállok case is neither surprising nor problematic as it is one of the major conflicts between state and/or corporate interests and Sámi rights. However, it is important to also examine other disputed projects, as the Gállok case is only one of many ongoing conflicts in Sápmi.

The proposed mine in Rönnbäcken has received some attention in academic debates. Beland Lindahl et al. (2016) and Beland Lindahl et al. (2018) analyze perceptions of mining in Rönnbäcken compared to other disputed mining projects. Both articles discuss how differences in attitudes towards mining projects relate to different understandings of human-nature relations and sustainable development. For instance, Beland Lindahl et al. (2016) found that all actors consider sustainable development as a desirable goal, but differ with regards to how the concept is defined. However, these articles do not adopt postcolonial or ecocritical perspectives. The articles were also published before CERD's verdict in 2020 and do therefore not consider recent changes in the project. As such, further research may provide new insights about the case.

2.5 Summary: identifying a research gap

To sum up, the literature review reveals that it is of great importance to study the dilemmas, tensions and conflicts that emerge in green energy projects to ensure that the green transition will be just. This necessitates a special inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. Moreover, further research on extractive projects in Sápmi is needed that adopts postcolonial perspectives and is attentive to narratives and other discursive practices. There is also generally a lack of ecocritical perspectives in previous literature, and the meaning ascribed to terms such as “the environment” and “nature” are often taken for granted by researchers. As such, the ambition of this thesis is to contribute to these academic debates by conducting a postcolonial-ecocritical analysis of narratives in Rönnbäcken.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Postcolonial ecocriticism

A postcolonial-ecocritical theoretical framework is used in this thesis because of the ambition to discuss both colonial relations (between humans) as well as human-nonhuman relations. Postcolonial ecocriticism has mainly developed as an approach in literary studies (Dürbeck 2019: 272) and is therefore also appropriate to analyze narratives. Further, postcolonial ecocriticism, as adopted in this thesis, provides critique of (colonial) knowledge production and anthropocentric notions of humans and non-humans, which will be elaborated in the following sections. As such, postcolonial ecocriticism is deemed relevant for the purposes of this thesis. It should also be noted that the term “non-humans” will be used throughout this thesis rather than “nature” or “the environment” to reflect the postcolonial-ecocritical assumption that humans are not separate from, or superior to, other species and ecosystems. *Non-humans* therefore simply refer to non-human species and ecosystems more generally.

Postcolonial ecocriticism combines key elements of postcolonial thought with ecocritical perspectives (Huggan & Tiffin 2015: 2). Postcolonial-ecocritical scholars thus shed light on “the continuities and discontinuities between colonial pasts and postcolonial presents” (Kinnvall 2020: 72), while also acknowledging cultural notions of, and relations between, “nature” and “humans” as the main cause of the ecological crises we face today. Importantly, according to ecocritical perspectives, scholars must critically examine and challenge these dominant perceptions and re-conceptualize relations between humans and non-humans (Marland 2013: 846). Postcolonial ecocriticism is therefore attentive to alternative ways of conceptualizing human-nonhuman relations, for instance by taking Indigenous knowledge and experiences into account. Land, for instance, is often viewed “not as an object of exploitation but as a ‘protagonist in its own right’” (Dürbeck 2019: 273).

Before discussing how postcolonial ecocriticism will be applied in this thesis, a brief description of postcolonial and ecocritical studies will be outlined, followed by a short discussion on advantages and potential pitfalls with postcolonial-ecocritical perspectives.

Postcolonialism is a broad and diverse field (Bhambra 2014: 115) concerned with colonial legacies and resistance to colonial oppression. Postcolonial studies are attentive to all forms of colonization and anti-colonial resistance, and link colonial histories to contemporary oppressive structures (Loomba 2015: 32-33). One of the most important contributions of postcolonial studies is perhaps their critique of colonial and Eurocentric storytelling and its impact on knowledge production (Bhambra 2014: 115). For instance, postcolonial scholars have critically discussed how dominant understandings of political phenomena continue to be based on racist and Eurocentric assumptions as colonial ideologies remain embedded in mainstream theories. By uncovering the underlying ideas, postcolonial studies aim to dismantle and provide alternatives to such dominant, colonial and racist knowledge structures (Kinnvall 2020: 72-73). Colonialism is thus understood as something that extends beyond territorial and material exploitation: “colonial settlements expand not only through lands but also minds” (de Leeuw 2023: 73). In the words of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the

most important area of [colonial] domination was the mental universe of the colonised, *the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world*. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986: 16, emphasis added)

In other words, material and political domination requires the colonization of the mind (de Leeuw 2023: 73).

Similar to postcolonialism, *ecocriticism* is not one coherent theory, and it has developed through close interactions with traditions such as ecofeminism, posthumanism, and the environmental justice movement. As such, ecocriticism encompasses various critical perspectives on cultural representations of human-nonhuman relations, with particular emphasis on ecological destruction caused by human activities (Marland 2013: 846). The core idea in ecocriticism is that “we are living in a time of environmental crisis that requires us to reassess with some urgency our modes of being in the world” (ibid: 847).

One important insight that ecocritical scholars have adopted (mainly from ecofeminists) is the rejection of various culturally determined binaries that determine relations between humans, but also between humans and non-humans, such as men/women, human/nature and civilized/primitive (ibid: 852, 855). Importantly, dominant notions of humanity largely depend on the separation of humans from non-humans: “the uncivilised, the animal and animalistic” (Huggan & Tiffin 2015: 5). This binary distinction has facilitated the naturalization of anthropocentrism (ibid: 5), the “ideological privileging of human positions, experiences, and interests [...] to the relative neglect or detriment of other lifeforms” (Schmitt 2023: 603). The assumption within many cultures that human dominance of ecosystems is “natural” justifies exploitation of non-humans. Ecocritical approaches therefore call for a total re-evaluation of what it means to

be human and to move away from binary “human-nature” relations (Huggan & Tiffin 2015: 5-6).

Merging these two fields, postcolonial ecocriticism essentially involves the analysis of racist, sexist and colonial relations, and how they shape cultural notions of “nature” and “society” (ibid: 15) and “human-nature” relations. One main assumption in postcolonial ecocriticism is that colonial exploitation (of humans) is intertwined with ecological destruction (by humans), as these activities build upon the same exploitative, colonial and binary ideologies. This thesis will only discuss colonial relations, although it should be noted that these are intimately linked with other power structures.

Some argue, however, that the merging of these two theoretical traditions is problematic for several reasons. First, both fields are characterized by theoretical diversity and are therefore not always easy to distinguish. For instance, Marxist postcolonial accounts differ from more poststructuralist perspectives, and ecocritical scholars tend to focus on either environmental concerns or animal-rights activism. There are also potential conflicts between postcolonialism and ecocriticism, mainly regarding their different prioritizations. Postcolonialism tends to be largely anthropocentric, while ecocritical scholars have been accused of prioritizing non-humans over marginalized groups (ibid: 2, 17). The predominantly Western and European origins of ecocriticism (Marland 2013: 846) can also be said to be problematic from a postcolonial perspective.

However, the differences and associated problems should not be overstated as there are many overlaps between the two fields. For example, postcolonial studies often include concerns for environmental issues, and many scholars have illustrated how colonial practices are justified by anthropocentric understandings of colonized spaces as “primitive”, “irrational”, “empty” and “unused” (Huggan & Tiffin 2015: 3-5). Furthermore, both ecocritical and postcolonial perspectives strive for social and environmental justice (Cilano & DeLoughrey 2007: 73). Thus, postcolonialism and ecocriticism are far from incompatible, and an overemphasis on the differences may result in the marginalization of postcolonial perspectives in the ecocritical literature (DeLoughrey & Handley 2011: 9).

3.1.1 Power

The discussion above indicates that power relations, not only between humans but also between humans and non-humans, are one of the main concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism. The postcolonial-ecocritical framework adopted in this thesis is therefore guided by a special focus on these power relations. It is important to note that power is an elusive concept; “power works in various forms and has various expressions that cannot be captured by a single formulation” (Barnett & Duvall 2005: 2). Thus, the definition adopted in this thesis is

deliberately narrow to capture one specific dimension of power, namely power as a *productive* force. That said, there are other dimensions of power that are also relevant from a postcolonial-ecocritical perspective that will not be accounted for due to the limited scope of this thesis.

Power can broadly be defined as “the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their own circumstances and fate” (Barnett & Duvall 2005: 3). In other words, actors’ capacities and subjectivities are shaped through diffuse social interactions and the social production of meaning. As such, power is produced through discursive practices. Productive notions of power thus entail a focus on, for instance, how subjects are discursively produced through social categories such as “civilized” or “Western”, how different political phenomena and issues are constructed, and how some knowledges become the legitimate and dominant modes of “knowing” while others are dismissed (ibid: 20-22). Power is therefore not understood as something actors possess or exert over others; rather it works through the construction and (re-)production of narratives and other discursive practices (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2011: 128).

In this thesis, *narratives* are defined as “stories that we tell to make sense of our surroundings” (de Leeuw 2023: 69). Narratives are constructed by agents and can both promote and undermine the dominant knowledge structures in a given cultural setting (ibid). As such, the notion of power adopted in this thesis acknowledges the importance of (human) agency without reducing power to the outcomes of intentional actions (Hayward & Lukes 2008: 5). Individual and collective actors construct narratives to understand their political contexts, and narratives are therefore of great political importance. Narratives are inherently normative as they reflect and reproduce politico-cultural values. It is in this sense that narratives relate to power. Dominant narratives reproduce culturally acceptable values, often at the expense of marginalized voices. These narratives thus reinforce the status quo and become the source of political identities and stability (Patterson & Monroe 1998: 316, 320-323).

While power shapes social capacities and relations, it is never about complete domination. Rather, power is always resisted and challenged by those whose abilities are limited by the social relations. Resistance to productive forms of power may include various efforts to deconstruct dominant narratives and discursive practices (Barnett & Duvall 2005: 22-23). For example, alternative narratives, or *counter-narratives*, can be constructed to challenge dominant narratives, usually as a response to the exclusion or mistreatment of particular socio-political groups or communities (Patterson & Monroe 1998: 320). These counter-narratives serve an important function as they question the taken-for-granted assumptions in mainstream narratives and offer alternative interpretations of various social phenomena (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2011: 151).

So how, then, can we understand (productive) power through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism? First, two sets of power relations are considered in this thesis: *colonial relations between the Sámi people and the Swedish mining industry* as well as *anthropocentric power relations between non-humans and humans*. Based on the background, previous literature and key assumptions in the theoretical framework, it is assumed that these relations are characterized by power asymmetries, which privileges the Swedish mining industry – including both state and corporate actors that engage in mining activities in Sweden – over Sámi people, and humans over non-humans. The objective of this thesis is not to analyze the existence of these power relations, but instead to discuss *how* these relations are upheld and/or resisted through narratives. The two sets of power relations are interlinked, as discussed above, as they essentially concern similar colonial logics of dominance and exploitation, but they will be treated separately for analytical purposes.

As discussed in the previous section, colonial power relations (between humans) are not limited to material or territorial domination and exploitation, but are also exercised through the production of meaning. Political power depends on the colonization of the mind, and colonial (material) exploitation is made possible through the marginalization of alternative knowledge, experiences and stories (de Leeuw 2023: 68-69). This could for instance include the denial or silencing of narratives that do not align with the dominant colonial narratives (Boyd 2023: 159), and “the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986: 16). Resistance is thus mainly performed through the discursive recollection of the stories that are dismissed in colonial narratives (de Leeuw 2023: 74).

The human-nonhuman power relations are, as discussed above, underpinned by binary, anthropocentric and colonial ideologies that separate “humans” from “nature” and depict humans as superior to non-humans, which legitimize ecological destruction and exploitation. Similar to the colonial relations (between humans), the anthropocentric power relations remain unchallenged through the rejection of non-anthropocentric narratives that conceptualize humans and non-humans in non-binary and non-exploitative ways. Resistance could therefore include counter-narratives that, for example, present alternative ways for humans to relate to non-humans or an emphasis on how non-humans are valuable in their own right.

As such, power, as understood in this framework, essentially concerns how various social and political phenomena are interpreted, and how we collectively understand our realities.

3.2 Analytical framework: narratives

In the remainder of this chapter, four narratives will be outlined based on the theoretical framework: *green growth*, *extractive exceptionalism*, *environmental justice*, and *human-nonhuman interdependency*. The four narratives are mainly inspired by Gabriele Dürbeck's (2019) postcolonial-ecocritical analysis of the narratives of the Anthropocene and Georgia de Leeuw's (2023) article on extractive exceptionalism and decolonial recollection in Gállok. These four narratives are believed to capture the core assumptions in, and critique provided by, the postcolonial-ecocritical framework as outlined above.

Dürbeck distinguishes five different narratives of the Anthropocene, which she identifies as (1) "the disaster narrative", (2) "the court narrative", (3) "the narrative of the Great Transformation", (4) "the (bio-)technological narrative", and (5) the "interdependency narrative of nature-culture" (2019: 275). The first narrative is not relevant for this thesis, as it concerns the Anthropocene and cannot be properly applied in the context of contested green energy projects. The third and fourth narratives are in this thesis combined and reformulated as the green growth narrative. The court narrative is understood in terms of environmental justice, and the last narrative is conceptualized as the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative. Dürbeck's narratives are complemented with de Leeuw's narrative of extractive exceptionalism.

The green growth and extractive exceptionalism narratives are assumed to be more positive towards mining in general, while the environmental justice and human-nonhuman interdependency narratives are more critical. However, it is not assumed that the first two narratives will be found only in pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken and the other two in anti-mining narratives. Theoretically, the first two narratives summarize key postcolonial-ecocritical critiques, whereas the last two capture some core assumptions in postcolonial ecocriticism. The narratives are used as analytical tools that will guide the analysis.

3.2.1 Green growth

According to Dürbeck, both the Great Transformation and bio-technical narratives advocate for an increased use of green technologies to solve ecological crises (2019: 275). These narratives are in this thesis instead conceptualized as narratives of *green growth*, as it better captures broader ideas about the relationship between environmental protection and green technologies.

Since the 2012 Rio+ 20 Conference on Sustainable Development, the idea of green growth has increasingly become dominant in climate and environmental debates (Hickel & Kallis 2020: 469). Narratives centered around green growth

build on the premise that economic growth is compatible with and/or necessary for environmental protection and climate change mitigation. Such narratives advocate for large-scale shifts in the economy and emphasize the need to both protect ecological values and invest in green technologies. In other words, economic growth, mainly through investments in green technologies, is seen as a prerequisite for ecological sustainability (Khan et al. 2021: 594, 600). There are also some rather utopian elements of green growth. Sophisticated scientific innovations and geoengineering are believed to mitigate the damages caused by previous (fossil-fuel based) industrial projects. At the same time, green growth is also seen as a realistic solution, in the sense that the climate crisis can be solved within the prevailing political and economic systems (Dale et al. 2016: 1).

From a postcolonial-ecocritical perspective, there are reasons to be wary of green growth narratives. Dürbeck asserts that the strong emphasis on green technologies as a solution to environmental problems overlooks the plurality of alternative pathways to sustainability and small-scale action (2019: 280). Further, Hickel (2021) argues that green growth initiatives will necessarily involve continued dependence on colonial and exploitative activities. Economic growth has historically depended on colonial practices and the exploitation of both humans and non-humans, yet the links between growth and colonization tends to be overlooked. As such, the idea that green technologies are the solution to environmental degradation is an illusion (Dale et al. 2016: 1). Importantly, “green growth is not about solving ecological crises but rather reinterpreting them, creating new opportunities to take business advantage of them, and diffusing responsibility for them” (Lohmann 2016: 42). In other words, green growth narratives tend to privilege economic growth over environmental protection.

Postcolonial-ecocritical scholars also criticize the underlying ecomodernist ideas in green growth narratives that ultimately legitimize exploitation, including the idea that “nature” can and should be managed through biotechnical innovations. Such assumptions are rooted in dichotomous notions of “nature” and “humans” (Dürbeck 2019: 280-282), in which non-humans are seen as objects, as means to achieve human prosperity (Hickel 2020: 69-70), as something “wild” (Death 2013: 6). “Nature” is, in other words, understood as a service provider in the green growth narrative (Schmidlehner 2023: 725). While such dualist notions that separate humans from non-humans largely permeate Western thought (Hickel 2020: 69-70), and thus are not unique to the green growth narrative, they are at the core of green growth narratives (Schmidlehner 2023: 725).

3.2.2 Extractive exceptionalism

Narratives of *extractive exceptionalism*, as conceptualized by de Leeuw, depict extractive activities as inherently virtuous, harmless and non-exploitative practices. The idea of extractive exceptionalism is also linked to a general idea of

Swedish exceptionalism. Sweden is commonly portrayed as exceptional with regards to human rights issues, welfare policies, gender equality, democracy and environmental protection, both in national imaginaries and by the international community. In Swedish imaginaries, mining helped create the modern welfare state and is therefore understood as something of great historical significance. In other words, extraction is something that brings development, prosperity and well-being. It is inherently harmless and extractive activities can even contribute to social and environmental protection, sustainability and protection of Indigenous rights (de Leeuw 2023: 68).

Extractive exceptionalism is therefore similar to green growth narratives in the sense that they both may highlight social and environmental benefits of resource extraction. The difference is however that the green growth narrative explicitly advocates for green technologies, which may or may not include extractive activities, and not resource extraction in itself. The extractive exceptionalist narrative, on the other hand, depict resource extraction as a source of prosperity and development more generally.

Adopting a postcolonial-ecocritical lens, the ideational underpinnings of “the virtue of extraction” involves two problematic dimensions. First, the idea that extraction is virtuous is highly anthropocentric as it encourages the exploitation of natural resources to benefit human interests. The idea of “nature” as an object to be exploited is thus at the core of the narratives of extractive exceptionalism, similar to the green growth narrative. Second, extractive exceptionalism is intertwined with ideas of *colonial exceptionalism*, which portray Scandinavian colonialism as a relatively “innocent” or less harmful form of colonization. The basic premise in extractive exceptionalism that resource extraction is “doing good” requires that decolonial critique and alternative narratives are downplayed or ignored. Extractive exceptionalism is thus based on a form of “colonial forgetfulness”, in which extractive activities are disconnected from colonial histories. As such, extractive exceptionalist narratives dismiss arguments that link resource extraction to colonization in any sense (ibid: 68, 71-72).

3.2.3 Environmental justice

The third narrative is inspired by Dürbeck’s “court narrative” in which rich countries in the Global North and neoliberal capitalism are portrayed as the main drivers of the climate crisis and environmental degradation. This narrative aims to shed light on those who bear the responsibility for global environmental crises (Dürbeck 2019: 275, 278). Similarly, Rob Nixon suggests an environmental justice approach to Anthropocene storytelling to illuminate how “the geomorphic powers of human beings have involved unequal exposure to risk and unequal access to resources” (Nixon 2014). Nixon highlights how the richest individuals in the world together with large corporations are historically responsible for the

global greenhouse gas emissions, which points to the unjust nature of the climate crisis. Similar to the court narrative, Nixon asserts that neoliberalism has spurred extreme inequalities between the “superrich” and the “ultrapoor”, which he argues tends to be ignored in mainstream narratives about the climate crisis (ibid).

The narrative of *environmental justice*, then, acknowledges and challenges “the unjust apportioning of both environmental risk and benefit globally” (Marland 2013: 861). This narrative often sheds light on, for instance, how environmentally harmful practices disproportionately affect marginalized social groups (ibid), and how environmental inequalities are linked to various power structures (Nachet et al. 2022: 3). The environmental justice narrative may also highlight how climate change policies, including green transition initiatives, can promote injustices locally. As such, according to this narrative, climate policies must be attentive to marginalized communities and address power asymmetries to strive towards environmental and climate justice (Resnik 2022: 740). While the environmental justice narrative outlined by Dürbeck and Nixon concerns discussions on climate change and the Anthropocene, it can also be used in other environmental issues and debates.

It is also important to note that the environmental justice narrative primarily concerns humans, often with an emphasis on social groups that are marginalized or disadvantaged (Marland 2013: 861). Thus, while this narrative is very different compared to the green growth and extractive exceptionalism narratives, it remains largely anthropocentric. Further, as previously discussed, the environmental justice movement is one important influence in postcolonial ecocriticism, and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that the environmental justice narrative resonates with postcolonial-ecocritical arguments to a large extent.

3.2.4 Human-nonhuman interdependency

The final narrative is conceptualized as *human-nonhuman interdependency*. This narrative stems from a posthumanist tradition and thus places emphasis on how humans and non-humans are interconnected (Dürbeck 2019: 275, 282; Biswas Mellamphy & Vangeest 2024: 7). Human-nonhuman relations are understood based on principles of non-anthropocentrism, which rejects the hierarchical ordering of humans and non-humans (Ferrante & Sartori 2016: 177). Central to the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative is therefore its critique of “human/nature” binaries (Dürbeck 2019: 282) and ideas of human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism. According to this narrative, we must on an ethical level decenter humanity and include other species and ecosystems in our assessments of the world. This is important since humans are understood as “*of nature*” rather than “*in nature*” or as separate from ecosystems (Hobden 2013: 175) As such, the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative argues that human societies have developed in close relation with other non-human systems, and that all “human

activity is pursued within, together with and with impacts on non-human nature” (ibid: 177).

The human-nonhuman interdependency narrative is thus widely non-anthropocentric, in the sense that non-human values are highlighted and anthropocentric assumptions about human superiority to other lifeforms are rejected. Human attempts to “master” non-human spaces through both ideology and technology are strongly criticized (Biswas Mellamphy & Vangeest 2024: 2, 7). Thus, the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative places emphasis on the ecological impacts of various human activities. From this perspective, these activities ultimately also harm humans due to the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans.

The human-nonhuman interdependency narrative is thus quite different from the other narratives, in the sense that it strives to go beyond anthropocentrism; to focus on the “more-than-human” (Cudworth & Hobden 2017: 5). However, the narrative is not completely non-anthropocentric or post-anthropocentric, as “the human remains an integral component of these narratives” (Biswas Mellamphy & Vangeest 2024: 9), although to a much lesser extent compared to the other narratives. Furthermore, the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative, similar to the environmental justice narrative, fits into the postcolonial-ecocritical arguments in the theoretical framework, mainly due to the posthumanist influences in postcolonial ecocriticism. The ideational basis of both the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative and the environmental justice narrative can thus be described as postcolonial-ecocritical.

4 Methodology

4.1 Narrative analysis

4.1.1 What is narrative analysis?

As outlined in the previous chapter, narratives are the stories we construct to make sense of our reality. Narratives play an important role in the construction of meaning in everyday life, as humans use them to position themselves in the world (Patterson & Monroe 1998: 315, 319). There is, however, no consensus regarding how these stories should be studied, and the field of narrative research is highly varied (Robertson 2012: 224). One can broadly distinguish between structural and poststructural perspectives. The main difference between these approaches is that structuralists assume that there are some universal principles that all narratives have in common, and hence that there are some inherently universal aspects of human experiences, while poststructuralists dismiss such universalist claims (Patterson & Monroe 1998: 317-319). Rather, it is argued that interpretations of narratives are unique and depend on the interactive dynamics between the researcher and the narrative (Jones et al. 2014: 5). Structuralism and poststructuralism are important influences in narrative research, but scholars rarely adopt a strictly structuralist or poststructuralist approach (Robertson 2012: 226-227). This thesis has some poststructuralist elements, mainly since it rejects universal principles, but it is not a poststructuralist narrative analysis per se.

The approach to narrative analysis used in this thesis understands *narrative as a mode of thought* rather than a specific type of text, in contrast to more structuralist-inspired methods. As such, narratives are seen “as a way of apprehending reality and as a primary means of communication” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2011: 15). Therefore, narratives can be found in all forms of human communications and not only in text-form. Narrative research, following the narrative-as-mode approach, aims to understand the construction of meaning through exploratory methods. The ambition is not to find objective “truths” but rather to provide interpretations. The narrative-as-mode approach also challenges the dominant position of empirical and positivist approaches in political science research (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2011: 16-18). As such, this thesis adopts an interpretivist position, which can be summarized in three key assumptions: (1)

that “reality” is socially and discursively constructed; (2) that understandings of social phenomena always depend on our interpretations of them; and (3) that the analysis of social and political phenomena cannot be objective (Marsh et al. 2018: 190). The purpose of interpretative research is therefore to *interpret* and *understand* rather than explain political phenomena (Vromen 2018: 244).

Narratives are intimately related to discourses, but the ways in which narrative researchers understand the relation between narratives and discourses varies. Some scholars view narratives as separate from discourses, while others perceive narratives as a form of discourse (Robertson 2012: 229). In this thesis, discourses are broadly understood as overarching systems of knowledge. Discursive practices produce knowledge and “delimit and define the legitimate mode of thought and perception of the thinker; one therefore cannot think outside a limited field of knowledge” (Williams 2012: 444). Narratives are here understood as a specific form of discursive practice, as *stories* that actors – individually or collectively – construct and reproduce to make sense of their realities. Narratives thus ascribe more importance to agency compared to other discursive practices (Patterson & Monroe 1998: 316).

4.1.2 Why study narratives?

Narrative analysis is an appropriate method when researchers want to analyze how meaning is constructed (Robertson 2012: 225). Due to the inherently social nature of storytelling, narrative researchers can gain valuable insights not only about a particular person or group, but also about wider social and political phenomena (Riessman 2008: 105). As mentioned in the previous section, narrative research ascribes greater significance to agency than other forms of discourse analysis, which motivates the choice of method. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how particular stories are used in the Rönnebäcken project rather than identifying overarching discourses. Furthermore, narrative analysis is not only attentive to what is included in stories but also what is left out: “Silences and gaps can be as telling as what is included” (Patterson & Monroe 1998: 329). Implicit messages and taken-for-granted assumptions can thus also be accounted for in narrative analyses (ibid: 316; Robertson 2012: 256). This is particularly useful given the focus on (productive) power in this thesis.

Narrative research also allows scholars to take experiences at the margins into account (Robertson 2012: 226), as well as the dynamic interactions between different narratives. One example of such interactions is how culturally dominant narratives are challenged by counter-narratives, as discussed in the previous chapter. As such, narrative research can shed light on both dominant and marginalized stories, which is the ambition of this thesis. For these reasons, narrative analysis is deemed appropriate for the purposes of this thesis.

4.1.3 How to study narratives in the Rönnbäcken case?

Narratives can be studied in very different ways, as stated above. In this thesis, texts and documentary primary sources will be qualitatively analyzed to interpret the social meaning attached to them. More specifically, the material will be used to “tell the story” (Vromen 2018: 249-250). An inductive and exploratory method is used, guided by open questions asked to the material (ibid: 245). For this reason, broadly formulated research questions were selected for this thesis. In the exploratory approach, it is primarily the material that guides the thesis. Identifying the material was the first step of the thesis, which then guided the choice of theory and concepts. By reading the material, I could identify the broader themes in the arguments and, by engaging with the theoretical framework, outline an appropriate analytical framework.

Furthermore, a holistic perspective is adopted, including careful attention to the context. One key premise of this thesis is that any interpretation of political phenomena must be contextual, and the thesis therefore aims to give a “thick” description of the Rönnbäcken case (ibid: 244-245). Relevant background information about the Rönnbäcken project as well as the history of colonial exploitation in Sápmi (see 1.3 Background) was deemed necessary to provide a contextual, in-depth analysis. Moreover, an in-depth analysis based on thick description will be achieved through qualitative data collection and the use of direct quotations (ibid).

The analysis will also be guided by empathetic neutrality. In other words, the thesis approaches the Rönnbäcken case with empathy and attempts to be non-judgmental (ibid). This does not mean, however, that the analysis claims to be objective, as this is not possible according to the interpretivist position. Rather, this aspect relates to the importance of *self-reflexivity* of the researcher. Interpretative researchers must acknowledge their value positions, preconceived notions and partialities and how these impact the interpretation of the material (ibid; Marsh et al. 2018: 190). Embedded in this thesis are normative assumptions about the need to incorporate climate, Indigenous and environmental concerns on equal terms. My ambition is also to shed light on Sámi perspectives to contribute to increased awareness of and knowledge about Sámi experiences, which has influenced the choice of theory to some extent. That said, I strive to treat the material with empathy and an open mind. Reflexivity also requires researchers to be transparent and to reflect on their choices regarding for instance the selection, collection and interpretation of data (Vromen 2018: 245), which I aim to do in this chapter.

Various measures will be taken to ensure the reliability of the thesis. The ambition to be as transparent and reflective as possible is important to generate reliable conclusions. Further measures taken to increase the reliability include providing large amounts of quotes from the material; making sure that the analysis is

coherent; striving to be innovative, and; using a limited number of concepts (Robertson 2012: 255).

The analysis is guided by the two secondary research questions. First, the analysis identifies what narratives are used among pro- and anti-mining actors in Rönnbäcken through descriptions and direct quotations from the material. Second, the narratives identified are linked to (colonial and anthropocentric) power relations and resistance by applying the theoretical framework. It should be noted that the terms “pro- and anti-mining narratives” are only used to distinguish between the arguments adopted by proponents and opponents to the Rönnbäcken mining project. As such, the actors and narratives identified as “pro- and anti-mining” do not necessarily have positive or negative attitudes towards mining more generally. The distinction is purely analytical and context-specific.

4.2 Material

The selected material primarily consists of news media sources, which are believed to capture both pro- and anti-mining voices in the Rönnbäcken case. Interviews or surveys could also have been useful to analyze what narratives the actors involved adopt, but newspaper articles are deemed more appropriate to capture the variety of narratives used by different actors over time. Newspaper articles published by the Swedish public service network *SVT Nyheter* will be analyzed. *SVT Nyheter* has covered the disputed Rönnbäcken project since BlueLake Mineral was first granted exploration rights. Many articles include interviews with protesters, local politicians and corporate representatives. Importantly, these sources attempt to highlight both pro- and anti-mining arguments and help create a dialogue between these two groups. Since *SVT Nyheter* is a public service platform, the articles published are politically neutral in the sense that they offer both sides to tell their stories, and refrain from positioning themselves in the debate. For these reasons, material published by *SVT Nyheter* is appropriate.

The limited scope of this thesis motivates the decision to only use articles published by *SVT Nyheter*. *SVT Nyheter* has published 49 articles about the mining project in Rönnbäcken between 2009-2023, which is a larger coverage of the issue compared to other newspapers (e.g. “Rönnbäcken” is mentioned in 27 articles published by *Dagens Nyheter*, and the search words “gruva i Rönnbäcken” (the Rönnbäcken mine) generated 14 articles in *Svenska Dagbladet*). Local newspapers such as *Västerbottens-Kuriren* might also have been relevant for this thesis but were not included, mainly because paywalls limited the access to many of the articles. The mining project in Rönnbäcken also has national and global significance, as CERD’s statements about the project

illustrates, and it is therefore relevant to analyze articles published by national news media.

Only 15 articles are used as material in the analysis, and eight articles are used to provide context (see 1.3.2 The mining project in Rönnbäcken). In total, only 17 of the 49 articles published by *SVT Nyheter* are used in this thesis. The articles were published between 2013-2023 (for an overview of the material, see Appendix I: Overview of the material (*SVT Nyheter*)). All articles were however considered and provided context for the author. Most of them were deemed less relevant for the purposes of this thesis. These mainly include articles with no interviews or statements with the parties involved, or with quotes or information that have no relevance for this thesis (such as descriptions of the company structure). Some articles were simply too short to analyze. More articles may have been used if the purpose was to analyze how news media platforms portray the Rönnbäcken case. While it is acknowledged that news media contribute to the construction of narratives, or can themselves be considered narratives, these articles are mainly treated as platforms that distribute the messages conveyed in pro- and anti-mining narratives.

However, the material is to some extent limited. Most of the selected articles are short and full interviews are not necessarily included. Potential biases of the reporters may also impact the questions asked or the quotes selected in the articles. Further, since interviews tend to be short, the statements by the actors involved often include key messages only, and interviewees may avoid more radical opinions. State and corporate representatives have generally offered shorter statements compared to protesters, and there are more interviews with protesters than mining advocates. This is not interpreted as *SVT Nyheter* intentionally favoring anti-mining actors. Rather, it is assumed that these actors can speak more freely compared to state and corporate actors. Because of these limitations, complementary material will also be analyzed. The selected complementary material is listed below:

- One episode of the radio podcast *Konflikt* (“Batteriboomens baksida – den vilda jakten på kobolt”) published by the Swedish public radio (*Sveriges Radio*) in 2021 about cobalt mining in Sweden and abroad.
- Two documents published by the Saami Council in 2021 following CERD’s verdict: *Kommentar till FN:s Rasdiskrimineringskommittés avgörande i Vapsten sameby v. Sverige (Rönnbäckenavgörandet)* (2021a), and *Open letter from the Saami Council and Vapsten Sami Reindeer Herding Community with respect to the Swedish government’s response to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination’s decision in Vapsten Sami Reindeer Herding Community v. Sweden* (2021b).
- An open letter to Bluelake Mineral signed in 2015 by representatives from several environmental and Sámi organizations, including the SGR-network, the Sámi Parliament in Sweden, Naturskyddsföreningen, Greenpeace, Urbergsgruppen, Skydda Skogen, Fältbiologerna,

Naturvernforbundet in Norway, Naturvernforbundet in Rana, Norway, and Naturvernforbundet in Nordland, Norway (Naturskyddsforeningen 2015).

- Bluelake Mineral’s 2013 annual report (NMR 2014). The document includes statements about the Rönnbäcken project and the company’s view on the individual complaint to CERD.
- Statements published on Bluelake Mineral’s webpage about its position on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its relations with Sámi communities (Bluelake Mineral 2024c “CSR”), as well as its position on environmental protection in mining projects (Bluelake Mineral 2024d “Environment”).
- Statements about the individual complaint to CERD by state and corporate representatives, including a press release by Bluelake Mineral that summarizes the Swedish government’s response to CERD in 2014, and which – at least indirectly – illustrate the company’s position (NMG 2014). State representatives have also commented on their response to CERD in a radio interview in 2014 by *Sameradion* (Swedish public radio focused on news that affect the Sámi people) (Heikki 2014).
- An interview with Bluelake Mineral’s CEO Peter Hjorth in 2020 following CERD’s verdict. Hjorth was interviewed by *Sameradion* (Poggats 2020).

Taken all together, the material is believed to capture both pro- and anti-mining narratives throughout the whole time period. The episode of *Konflikt* is relevant since both pro- and anti-mining actors are interviewed. The other materials were selected because they include pro- and anti-mining actors’ positions in the conflict, as well as comments to CERD’s statements in 2013 and 2020. In contrast to Sámi and environmental organizations, which have repeatedly expressed their discontent with the project, corporate and state representatives have not been as vocal about the project, as mentioned above. For this reason, most of the complementary material covers pro-mining narratives. The material mainly reflects Bluelake Mineral’s position since the company has been more vocal about the issue than state representatives.

The process of selecting material ultimately determines how a particular case is interpreted, and there is always a risk of selection bias caused by factors such as lack of accessibility or awareness. Such selection bias is difficult to circumvent but has been limited through reflective justification of the materials selected (Vromen 2018: 250). That said, the process of material selection will never be ideal. As such, it is acknowledged that there may be other materials that may be of great relevance that are not considered simply due to lack of awareness of their existence.

Most of the material is in text-form, but some news media sources also include video or audio material (e.g. *Konflikt* 2021; Heikki 2014; Poggats 2020). All materials are treated the same, however, as the narrative approach adopted in this thesis does not differentiate between different forms of narratives. Further, most of the material is written (or spoken) in Swedish, and much of the quotes in the

analysis are therefore translated. This could potentially be problematic as the translator always has to balance whether the material should be translated “word for word” or “sense for sense” (Qoyyimah 2023: 4). Direct translations of every word may overlook the cultural meaning of the terms used, whereas translations that intend to translate their meaning may take too many liberties and change the meaning. This has been particularly challenging since much of the material includes spoken language. This is however less problematic as this thesis intends to analyze content rather than language. Further, original quotes will be included in the appendix to ensure transparency and accuracy (see Appendix II: Translated quotes (original)).

4.3 Operationalization

The narratives are operationalized thematically. Indications of each narrative are summarized below (Table 2).

One of the key ideas in the green growth narrative is that green technologies are important or even necessary for the green transition. As such, statements about the importance of the Rönnebäcken mine for the green transition, as well as claims that green technologies (including the extraction of critical minerals) more generally are needed, indicate that the green growth narrative is applied. This could for example include descriptions of significant nickel and cobalt findings in Rönnebäcken.

Extractive exceptionalism has two basic premises: that Swedish mining can contribute significantly to economic development and prosperity, and that mining in Sweden is “exceptionally non-intrusive, and environmentally and socially sustainable” (de Leeuw 2023: 76). Descriptions of how the Rönnebäcken mine can contribute to international and/or domestic progress therefore indicate that such narratives are present. For instance, actors may emphasize the job opportunities, tax revenues or other forms of local development that the mine will bring. Descriptions of the Rönnebäcken mine as socially and environmentally sustainable and non-harmful also indicate the presence of extractive exceptionalist narratives. Such descriptions include for instance that mining and Sámi livelihoods can coexist, that Swedish mining processes guarantee environmental protection, or that the Rönnebäcken mine is more sustainable compared to mines in other countries. Explicit rejections of claims that mining is discriminatory or unjust may also indicate extractive exceptionalism.

The third narrative places emphasis on environmental justice, and describes mining as exploitative, unjust and/or colonial. Statements that indicate that these narratives are present highlight the negative impacts of the mine on, for instance, local communities and the Sámi people. These statements must also be framed in

terms of injustice to indicate that the environmental justice narrative is adopted, for example by highlighting how some groups are disproportionately harmed by the mine or uneven local, national or global responsibilities for the green transition. The language used can also indicate that this narrative is used, for instance by using terms such as “injustice”, “exploitation” and “colonization”.

The human-nonhuman interdependency narrative is centered around non-anthropocentric ideas of coexistence of human and non-human species, and the operationalization involves two dimensions. First, the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative emphasizes environmental destruction and depicts the mine as a threat to local ecosystems and species. Descriptions of, for instance, environmental harms and lack of environmental protection in Rönnbäcken may thus indicate that this narrative is used. Second, statements about how humans coexist with and depend upon other species and ecosystems is also an indication of this narrative. Such statements could for example include that environmental damages caused by mining harm the human communities living in the area, or that communities depend on local ecosystems.

Narrative	Operationalization
Green growth	Mining in Rönnbäcken, and extraction of critical minerals more generally, is described as necessary or important for the green transition. E.g. descriptions of significant mineral deposits in Rönnbäcken.
Extractive exceptionalism	(a) Descriptions of how the Rönnbäcken mine can contribute to international and/or domestic progress. E.g. in terms of job opportunities, tax revenues or local development. (b) Descriptions of the Rönnbäcken mine as socially and environmentally sustainable and non-harmful. E.g. that mining in Rönnbäcken/Sweden is better ethically, socially and environmentally compared to other countries; that mining and reindeer husbandry can coexist; or that mining in Rönnbäcken is not discriminatory or unjust.
Environmental justice	Descriptions of the negative impacts of the mine on for instance local communities and the Sámi people in terms of injustice. E.g. descriptions of how certain groups or communities are disproportionately impacted or harmed by mining, or through the use of terms such as “injustice”,

	“exploitation”, and “colonization”.
Human-nonhuman interdependency	<p>(a) Descriptions of environmental degradation caused by mining; the Rönnbäcken mine as a threat to local ecosystems and species; and/or lack of (legal/political) protection of non-human species and ecosystems.</p> <p>(b) Descriptions of how local (human) communities depend upon ecosystems, and/or how environmental damages caused by mining also harm local (human) communities.</p>

Table 2: Operationalization of narratives

With regards to power, two sets of power relations are of interest in this thesis: colonial relations between the Sámi people and the Swedish mining industry, and anthropocentric human-nonhuman relations. The Swedish mining industry refers to both state and corporate actors that engage in mining activities in Sweden. More specifically, in the Rönnbäcken case, this includes government representatives and Bluelake Mineral. The focus is on how power relations are promoted or resisted. Thus, it is not a question of whether these power asymmetries exist or not, but rather how the power relations are upheld or contested through narratives. Such power dynamics will be identified through careful attention to how Sámi culture, including reindeer husbandry, and non-humans are depicted and considered in the narratives. For instance, lack of inclusion, or explicit rejections, of Sámi and non-human concerns indicate that power relations are promoted, while the inclusion of such concerns as well as critique of mistreatment and/or exploitation may indicate resistance.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Research ethics are particularly important when investigating topics that concern Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities across the globe have criticized the lack of Indigenous representation and involvement in research processes (Juutilainen & Heikkilä 2016: 82). Moreover, research projects tend to bring little or no benefit to Indigenous peoples, and may even be directly harmful to these communities. It is thus necessary to thoroughly consider research ethics to ensure that research involving or impacting Indigenous peoples is both safe and beneficial to their communities (Fournier et al. 2023: 326).

Bringing the discussion to a Nordic context, research related to the Sámi people has a dark and problematic history. In the early 20th century, the State Institute for Racial Biology⁵ in Uppsala conducted highly unethical and harmful research on the Sámi people in Sweden. Researchers viewed the Sámi people as inferior, and Sámi communities were forced to participate in dehumanizing research projects, resulting in the traumatization and marginalization of the Sámi people (Malmberg 2021). Further, Sámi researchers have criticized the colonial approach that often remains in research involving Sámi communities, as decolonization attempts in academia have been largely insufficient (Juutilainen & Heikkilä 2016: 88-89). For instance, there is still uncertainty regarding what research ethics should entail and how it should be performed. Since there are no common guidelines, there are considerable differences between scholars (Drugge 2016: 263, 276).

This thesis does not intend to do research “on” Sámi people or culture. As such, the risk of contributing to (re-)traumatization is low. Ethical considerations are however still important, in particular as a non-Sámi researcher. In research projects involving Sámi people and issues, researchers must ask themselves whether the project benefits Sámi communities or merely causes harm and contributes to historical injustices (West 2021: 201-203). Principles of mindfulness, respect and recognition of Sámi rights therefore guide the research process (Tunón et al. 2016: 68-69).

4.5 Challenges and limitations

As with any research design, the methodological choices made in this thesis entail some challenges and limitations. Some of them have already been discussed in this chapter and will therefore not be the focus of this final section.

One common critique against narrative research is that its focus on contextual interpretation significantly reduces the possibility of generating generalizable results (Jones et al. 2014: 5). However, since this thesis adopts an interpretivist position, the lack of generalizability is not an issue. While the results are not generalizable, they can still provide important insights that are relevant in other cases as well. That said, “careful thought is required to determine what exactly narrative tells us and how it should be used” (Patterson & Monroe 1998: 327). The findings of this thesis will not be taken as absolute “truths”, but as one of many possible interpretations of the Rönnbäcken case.

⁵ *Statens institut för rasbiologi* (1922-1959). Research conducted at the institute was underpinned by scientific racism, mainly during the leadership of Herman Lundborg in 1922-1936 (Uppsala University 2024). While one of the main ambitions of the institute was to improve public health in Sweden, the institute mainly conducted racist and discriminatory research on the Sámi people (FLH n.d.).

Furthermore, one of the main challenges in narrative research is that the theories and concepts used are narratives themselves (ibid: 324). As such, the analysis provided by this thesis can also be understood as a narrative and will ultimately be limited by the theoretical assumptions and the identified research problem. In other words, the researcher's narrative will inevitably have blind spots. To address this issue, normative assumptions and positions have been disclosed and discussed. A similar problem relates to the material, as discussed above. While narrative research is associated with some more or less unavoidable problems, it can provide important insights to the field of political science (ibid: 330).

5 Analysis: narratives in the Rönnbäcken mining project (2013-2024)

5.1 Pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken

5.1.1 Extractive exceptionalism

There are many indications that the extractive exceptionalist narrative is used by pro-mining actors in Rönnbäcken. The benefits of the mine are emphasized, mainly in terms of local development. Bluelake Mineral's 2013 annual report, for example, states that the mining project will create a significant number of jobs both locally and regionally. The company also estimates that the mine will generate more than 2 billion SEK in tax revenues to the Storuman municipality. The project may also contribute to population growth and promote "attractive" development in Hemavan and Tärnaby (NMR 2014: 2). Bluelake Mineral also emphasizes these benefits on their webpage, and states that their operations, including the Rönnbäcken project,

will create a significant number of jobs directly and indirectly at both local and regional level when mining is initiated. The company's ambition is to secure local and regional competence as much as possible before and after mining starts (Bluelake Mineral 2024c).

Further, Bluelake Mineral "sees it as essential to contribute to creating attractive communities for employees and residents in our locations" (ibid).

Other actors also highlight the benefits of the project for the local communities. One manager at a local ski facility, for instance, stated that "[the mine] would provide many job opportunities and possibly make the town thrive all year round"⁶ (Elfström 2013). Similarly, Ulf Widman, member of the municipal executive board in Storuman, said that "there were 486 people who lived here [in Tärnaby] last year, so it is quite a small town. It would mean a lot to us to bring

⁶ Own translation.

jobs opportunities here”⁷ (Konflikt 2021). However, while the mining project is believed to bring much needed local development, it is not viewed as crucial for the municipality. Tomas Mörtzell, municipal commissioner in Storuman, stated that:

If the environmental requirements are met, it’s an important project, but it’s not vital for the municipality. We have clarified that if environmental issues and conflicts of interest can be handled, our basic attitude is positive. But we don’t want a mine at any price⁸ (SVT Nyheter 2013c).

Merely emphasizing the benefits of the mining project is not, however, a sufficient indication of extractive exceptionalism. There also seems to be a more or less explicit assumption that mining processes in Sweden sufficiently consider environmental and social impacts of mining activities. Fredric Bratt, former CEO of Bluelake Mineral, said in an interview that:

[the mine] will of course have an impact [on local ecosystems], but we must meet all environmental requirements. If we can’t prove that we can run this [project] in a safe manner, we won’t get an environmental permit and then there won’t be a project⁹ (Elfström 2013).

The company has also repeatedly claimed that they take “the environmental considerations very seriously”¹⁰ (NMR 2014: 5), and that environmental harms will be minimized:

Environmental and sustainability work in the mining industry is long-term. Bluelake Mineral strives to conduct *a maximum resource and environmentally efficient operation* during the period up to the mine start, during mining and after mining operations have ended.

[The company has] good historical knowledge about how this activity affected the environment and nature [in previous operations] and how the business could be optimized for the least possible impact.¹¹ (Bluelake Mineral 2024d)

Pro-mining narratives assume that it is possible to promote environmental, social and economic values through the mining project, and that the mine can be established “in an environmentally and socio-economically sensible way”¹² (Everljung 2021a). As expressed by a local resident, the negative impacts of

⁷ Own translation.

⁸ Own translation.

⁹ Own translation.

¹⁰ Own translation.

¹¹ Original, emphasis added.

¹² Own translation.

mining on local ecosystems are not desirable, “[b]ut I have to consider that it [will provide] work, you get an income, and *I have to trust that it is managed in a good and safe way*”¹³ (Elfström 2013). As such, there seems to be an assumption in pro-mining narratives that Swedish mining legislations and environmental regulations are sufficient to protect environmental values almost by default.

A similar message was conveyed in response to CERD’s critique in 2013. Bratt said in an interview that “[w]e follow Swedish law and we have received the necessary exploitation concessions. That said, there is a long way to go before mining becomes relevant” (SVT Nyheter 2013b). When asked whether CERD’s critique posed a problem to the project, Bratt further stated that “[w]e have to look at that part more in detail. We do not know what grounds the UN has for making their statements, *what knowledge they have of Swedish legislation and our mining project*, and what factual grounds they have”¹⁴ (ibid). Similarly, following CERD’s recommendations to the Swedish government in 2020 to suspend the mining project in Rönnebäcken, Bluelake Mineral’s current CEO Peter Hjorth said that:

I can say that we as a company do not fully share all the conclusions in the document, *but we believe that there is well-functioning Swedish legislation when it comes to the mineral law and environmental legislation* which governs very carefully how and if and when a mine may be established and in what way, and that the whole process is very carefully regulated. Different interests must be balanced. And it is, of course, a very common occurrence that mining interests or mineral interests stand against... often the reindeer herding... reindeer herding interests, and the basic idea in Swedish legislation [is] that you have to see if there are *opportunities for coexistence*. So that is our view.¹⁵ (Poggats 2020)

Thus, CERD’s critique is downplayed because Swedish mineral and environmental legislation is assumed to be sufficient to protect Indigenous and environmental values. The quote also illustrates a further indication of extractive exceptionalism, namely the assumption that mining and reindeer husbandry can coexist. Statements about coexistence and the possibility of finding solutions to the conflict through dialogue are repeatedly presented by pro-mining actors in Rönnebäcken, mainly by corporate representatives:

The company’s basic view is that mining operations and reindeer husbandry can co-exist and to adapt the business accordingly. (Bluelake Mineral 2024c)

¹³ Own translation, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Own translation, emphasis added.

¹⁵ Own translation, emphasis added.

We will investigate how the mining operations will be designed and what conditions will apply to protect public and individual interests. We have had a dialogue with the Vapsten reindeer herding community and will conduct further consultations in the application for an environmental permit.¹⁶ (SVT Nyheter 2013b)

It is important in all mining projects to have a good dialogue with the local community, residents, the business world and not least the reindeer herders. We haven't started it yet. But if the report looks promising, we will reactivate the dialogue.¹⁷ (Everljug 2021a)

The idea of coexistence is also expressed by non-corporate actors. Mörtzell, for instance, said that he was not worried about CERD's decision to criticize the project in 2013: "Based on the decisions I have read, the company is already required to have consultations in order to be able *to find a solution that will suit everyone*"¹⁸ (SVT Nyheter 2013c).

While the possibility of coexistence is taken for granted, claims of discrimination and exploitation are rejected:

We believe that a mine can be established with... in a sensible way, that you should be able to coexist, that *it is not a matter of discrimination*, but on the contrary, we will very seriously consider how to coexist with the reindeer husbandry and the Sámi, of course.¹⁹ (Poggats 2020)

In response to CERD, as described by state and corporate representatives, the accusations of discrimination caused by the mining project in Rönnbäcken are dismissed. Olov Widgren, special adviser at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, said in 2014 that CERD has not specified how the Rönnbäcken mine causes discrimination against the Sámi people: "They have not further elaborated on the ways in which they would have been discriminated against because of their ethnic origin as Sámi"²⁰ (Heikki 2014). Similar statements are made by Bluelake Mineral in their summary of the government's response to CERD in 2014:

Moreover, *an exploitation concession does not, in itself, have any significant impact on the possibilities to carry out reindeer herding in these areas*. The Government therefore does not consider Vapsten to be victims under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (the Convention).

¹⁶ Own translation.

¹⁷ Own translation.

¹⁸ Own translation, emphasis added.

¹⁹ Own translation, emphasis added.

²⁰ Own translation.

Secondly, the Government states that *Vapsten has not shown that they, due to their Sami ethnic origin, have been treated less favorably than other parties affected by the exploitation concession.*²¹ (NMG 2014)

The accusations are also rejected by state and corporate representatives on the basis that “there are currently no mining activities in this area”²² (Heikki 2014):

[...] the Government clarifies that no mining operations are conducted in Rönnbäcken at this point and that such operations are not permitted until Nickel Mountain has applied for, and been granted, an environmental permit by the Land and Environment Court. Hence, there are no operations to suspend. (NMG 2014)

It is important to clarify that there are no mining activities in Rönnbäcken and that the applications for environmental permits are two years in the future. Before that, we must consult with all stakeholders²³ (SVT Nyheter 2013a).

Taken all together, there are significant indications of extractive exceptionalism in pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken.

5.1.2 Green growth

There are also indications that the green growth narrative is adopted by pro-mining advocates. However, while the extractive exceptionalist elements were identified throughout the whole time period, the emphasis on green growth could be observed first in 2021. This is perhaps not surprising as the interest in the climate crisis and the need for a green transition in political debates has increased in recent years. In 2021, Peter Hjorth said in an interview that “[t]he green climate transition where we are moving towards electric vehicles is creating completely new industries, such as the battery sector. They have great demands for, for example, nickel”²⁴ (Everlång 2021a). Recent findings of cobalt across Västerbotten are also highlighted to illustrate the importance of a mine in Rönnbäcken. According to unit manager Erika Ingvald at the Geological Survey of Sweden (SGU), “Rönnbäcken is the largest deposit [in Sweden] and would yield the most cobalt. If mining companies are going to initiate mining, they want deposits that, per tonne of rock, contain as much cobalt as possible”²⁵ (Everlång 2023).

²¹ Original, emphasis added.

²² Own translation.

²³ Own translation.

²⁴ Own translation.

²⁵ Own translation.

While the Rönnbäcken mining project is depicted as important for the green transition, the importance of green technologies is also justified in terms of strategic independence and geopolitics. Anneli Wirtén, director general at SGU, highlights the increasing need for cobalt and other critical minerals because of geopolitical uncertainties:

The rapid development has led to a lack of access to raw materials, and *a strategic independence for the EU is becoming increasingly important because of the geopolitical situation*. We therefore need to ensure access to the sustainable raw materials needed for battery manufacturing within the EU ²⁶ (ibid).

A similar message is conveyed by Hjorth (PH) in an interview in 2023:

PH: We are the only big [mining company] in the EU that is not dependent on, for example, nickel from Russia. *And [critical minerals] are strategically important for the green transition*, so it is evident that [Rönnbäcken] is incredibly important, both for Sweden but [also] for the entire EU.

Reporter: [Rönnbäcken] has also been described as the largest or most interesting cobalt deposit in Sweden. What do you say about that?

PH: Yes, that is correct. We can produce 23,000 tonnes of nickel per year in this deposit, but we can also produce almost 700 tonnes of cobalt, so we should definitely take advantage of that. *It is a great opportunity.*²⁷ (ibid)

While geopolitical aspects are highlighted, the ecological dimensions are largely overlooked. Most notably, the negative environmental impacts caused by mining in the area are by some seen as necessary costs to achieve the green transition. In response to the protesters' concerns for the environmental impacts of the mine, Ulf Widman said that:

Yes, I understand them too, it's not fun to destroy a landscape. There will of course be an impact on nature. *But maybe that's the price you have to pay to have all that... and make car batteries or have our iPhones and all those other cell phones, then maybe we also have to take some responsibility... for the extraction.*²⁸ (Konflikt 2021)

²⁶ Own translation, emphasis added.

²⁷ Own translation, emphasis added.

²⁸ Own translation, emphasis added.

The green transition is thus framed mainly in terms of geopolitical importance for Sweden and the EU, rather than climate and environmental concerns. This illustrates the postcolonial-ecocritical critique of the green growth narrative's tendency to overlook climate and environmental concerns in debates about the green transition. However, geopolitical rather than purely economic dimensions of the green transition are primarily highlighted in the Rönnebäcken case at the expense of local ecosystems.

5.1.3 Environmental justice

Some elements of the environmental justice narrative could also be observed. While pro-mining narratives mainly claim that mining and social and environmental values could coexist, the increased focus on green growth also made some pro-mining actors highlight the green transition and electrification in terms of (in)justice. For instance, when talking about the increase in extractive projects in Rönnebäcken and elsewhere, Ulf Widman argued that Sweden must take its responsibility for the green transition:

We shouldn't have to import [critical minerals] from, for example, Africa. If we have that product here and can [extract] it in a more, well, access it in a better and more environmentally friendly way, then I think that it should [at least] be considered before it is rejected"²⁹ (Konflikt 2021).

This argument is also proposed by Hans-Peter Karlsson (HK), liberal member of the municipal executive board in Storuman:

HK: I don't think it's credible to say no to mines, regardless of where they are located. If we want to be able to switch to electrification.

Reporter: But when you say credibility, what do you mean?

HK: Well, I mean that you can't on the one hand drive an electric car and on the other hand say no to extracting the minerals needed to manufacture electric cars, *it's not sustainable, it's not morally manageable*. So this "not in my backyard" [argument], we can't act like that. It's better that it's managed in a good way, both environmentally and in terms of the working environment, than that child laborers in the Congo have to dig up cobalt so we can drive electric cars. It's not OK.³⁰ (ibid)

²⁹ Own translation.

³⁰ Own translation, emphasis added.

While they do not view the mine in Rönnbäcken as exploitative or unjust, they acknowledge global injustices in the distribution of responsibilities and costs for the green transition and criticize what they perceive as hypocrisy in anti-mining arguments. However, these statements also reveal some extractive exceptionalist elements. According to these arguments, mining in Rönnbäcken is much more ethically and environmentally sustainable compared to other countries, and implicit in these statements is the assumption that exploitative or harmful practices do not occur in Sweden.

5.2 Anti-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken

5.2.1 Environmental justice

The environmental justice narrative is without a doubt the most common narrative among anti-mining actors. All anti-mining actors describe the “devastating damages” that mining in Rönnbäcken will have on the Vapsten reindeer herding community (Saami Council 2021a):

With associated industrial areas, slag ponds, infrastructure, dust spreading, etc. the mining area would make Rönnbäcken unusable as a reindeer grazing land, thereby depriving the [Vapsten] reindeer herding community of more or less irreplaceable spring and autumn land. In addition, the traditional pastoral migration routes between the different seasonal pastures would be blocked.³¹ (Saami Council 2021a)

The mining project is mainly understood as a violation of Indigenous and human rights, in particular among Sámi actors. In the open letter to Bluelake Mineral in 2015, environmental and Sámi organizations urged the company to completely suspend the project in Rönnbäcken since it, in their view, violates Indigenous rights:

The Rönnbäck project is the large-scale nickel mining project with three open pit mines planned on traditional Sámi year-round lands in the upper part of the Ume River, outside of Tärnaby. Despite the Sámi and many others protesting loudly for several years. The Sámi people have tried in several different ways to bring forth the enormous consequences that the project entails and that there is no free and informed prior consent and that it

³¹ Own translation.

violates Indigenous rights. The project affects the entire Ume River valley as well as hundreds of Sámi, of which the majority of all Sámi who are affected have no influence in the process.³² (Naturskyddsföreningen 2015)

The message that the project in Rönnbäcken is a violation of Sámi rights is repeated throughout the time period. For instance, Mattias Åhrén, Indigenous rights lawyer and head of the Human Rights Unit of the Saami Council, stated in 2013 that “[t]his is fundamentally a human rights issue. The government has completely missed the point”³³ (Bergström & Jonsson 2013). Similarly, Marie Persson Njajta, member of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden and founder of the SGR-network, commented on CERD’s critique directed at the Swedish government in 2013 that “I hope and expect that the UN will take human rights and Indigenous rights into account”³⁴ (Frygell & Lindahl 2014).

Anti-mining voices also highlight how Sweden continues to ignore international criticism regarding its handling of Indigenous rights. Following the Swedish government’s decision to approve the mining project in Rönnbäcken in 2013, Jenny Wik Karlsson, lawyer at Svenska Samernas Riksförbund (SSR)³⁵, stated that:

Yesterday’s decision clearly signals the government’s position that they have no intention, despite international criticism, to ensure the possibilities for long-term, sustainable and traditional reindeer husbandry³⁶ (SVT Nyheter 2013g).

Similarly, Åhrén said in an interview in 2013 that:

It is highly remarkable that a country that considers itself to be a constitutional state continues to ignore the UN’s demand that Sweden must amend its mineral law to clarify that Sámi reindeer herding communities have the right to say yes or no to mines within their traditional areas³⁷ (SVT Nyheter 2013f).

He further states that the government cannot continue to ignore the international criticism:

Based on the criticism that [CERD] directed at Sweden just a few weeks ago, we are convinced that [CERD] will condemn Sweden. When Sweden is

³² Own translation.

³³ Own translation.

³⁴ Own translation.

³⁵ SSR is a Sámi organization that promotes and safeguards Sámi interests in Sweden, in particular issues related to reindeer husbandry (SSR n.d.).

³⁶ Own translation.

³⁷ Own translation.

convicted in the individual complaint, they cannot continue to ignore the UN if they don't want to lose all reputation internationally. Reasonably, Sweden must revise the mineral law so it respects the rights of the reindeer herding communities³⁸ (ibid).

This critique against the Swedish government is further highlighted by the Saami Council, which is one of the parties that filed the individual complaint to CERD, in their response to CERD's decision in 2021:

What Sweden submits is in fact that it has no obligation *ever*³⁹ to end or rectify discrimination and other human rights violations it subjects the indigenous Sami and others to under the ICERD⁴⁰ as confirmed by the CERD [...]. In sum, in its Response *Sweden announces that it will do nothing to respect and comply with human rights of Sami reindeer herding communities, irrespective of the CERD's call on it to do so.*⁴¹ [...] Apparently, *Sweden's disdain for the Sami reindeer herding's land and resource rights is so entrenched that it prefers resorting to chimeras and alternative facts before recognizing, respecting or implementing such.*⁴² (Saami Council 2021b)

Furthermore, the violation of Indigenous rights in the Rönnebäcken case is understood as a result of discriminatory mineral legislation rather than flaws in the particular mining process in Rönnebäcken (which is also the conclusion that CERD draws):

[...] the outcome of the decision-making process was essentially “pre-determined” by the design of the national legislation. The permit for the intervention in the [Vapsten] reindeer herding community's traditional land and reindeer husbandry was not a product of the *application* of the law, but of *the law itself*. [...] The right to property⁴³, properly implemented, should in other words exclude many of the resource exploitations, other industrial and infrastructure projects, etc. that are currently ongoing and planned within the reindeer husbandry area.⁴⁴ (Saami Council 2021a)

As such, Sámi people are systematically discriminated against because of serious flaws in national legislation, as argued by the Saami Council.

³⁸ Own translation.

³⁹ Emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

⁴¹ Emphasis added.

⁴² Emphasis added.

⁴³ The Saami Council refers to the right to property as enshrined in article 5 (d) (v) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and was one of the rights that the individual complaint concerned (CERD 2020).

⁴⁴ Own translation, emphasis in original.

Another commonly used argument in anti-mining narratives is that the Rönnbäcken mine is an existential threat to Sámi culture and livelihoods. The mine is depicted as a threat mainly because it negatively impacts reindeer pasture lands. Inger-Ann Omma, member of the Vapsten reindeer herding community, said in 2013 that “[Bluelake Mineral’s] mines are located in the heart of the [Vapsten] reindeer herding community. The mining system splits the reindeer herding community in two and completely devastates central pasture lands”⁴⁵ (SVT Nyheter 2013f). Similar arguments are identified in an interview with Åhrén (MÅ):

MÅ: If the mine is established in [Rönnbäcken], it will have large-scale consequences for the entire reindeer herding community.

Reporter: Are you saying that the Vapsten reindeer herding community cannot exist if the mine becomes a reality?

MÅ: Yes. It’s obvious. If you divide the reindeer herding community into two parts, *it will not be possible to carry out reindeer husbandry*. The mine will destroy the only grazing areas that the reindeer herding community has access to during fall and spring⁴⁶ (Bergström & Jonsson 2013).

Not only is the mining project perceived as a threat, but mineral policies more generally are claimed to threaten Sámi livelihoods. Persson Njajta, for instance, argue that Swedish mineral policies “threaten the existence of the entire Sámi people in the long run” (SVT Nyheter 2013a). According to Lars-Anders Ågren, chairman of Vapsten reindeer herding community, “[i]t will be the death of us in the Vapsten reindeer herding community as reindeer herders and families and for our future and our children. *There will be no future for them if the mine is established*”⁴⁷ (Elfström 2013). As such, many local Sámi express that they are worried about the future of their children and the survival of Sámi culture:

I don’t want to expose my children and future generations to the long-term health risks, or other people’s children. It’s terrible. There won’t be any future left, we won’t be able to live off the land and in harmony with nature as we do now⁴⁸ (ibid).

I worry about our children’s future. New fortune seekers appear while we are just trying to live here. It doesn’t matter who runs the project, we will never stop fighting for the children’s and future generations’ dignity, land, water, food, health, culture, future and rights⁴⁹ (Sameradion & SVT Sápmi 2016).

⁴⁵ Own translation.

⁴⁶ Own translation, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Own translation, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Own translation.

⁴⁹ Own translation.

While no mining activities have been initiated in the area, the exploitation concession is viewed by many as an imminent threat:

As long as there is a permit, there is an overriding threat that the mine will become a reality⁵⁰ (SVT Nyheter 2013d).

The exploitation concessions for Rönnbäck remain until 2037, i.e. for another 22 years. Having these heavy permits hanging over one's life and one's area until 2037 is not dignified or sustainable as it threatens the entire Sámi way of life in the area so fundamentally, but also the environment and other livelihoods.⁵¹ (Naturskyddsforeningen 2015)

The fact that people have to live with [the permit] hanging over their heads until 2037, it's like... It's quite unreal, you can't think about it, you'll just go crazy.⁵² (Konflikt 2021)

Furthermore, the anti-mining narratives link the Rönnbäcken mining project to other extractive projects in Sápmi. For instance, Persson Njajta describes the local resistance against the Rönnbäcken project as a continuation of resistance against previous forms of exploitation in the area. The hydropower projects in the area in the 1960s are described as severe traumas for the local communities:

In our parents' generation... They live a life before the dam and a life after. Because there were such big changes in the landscape as well as... in [their] lives and fishing and the ice and... It was a huge trauma for... for many people who live [here]... and a lot of people had to leave. Couldn't live here anymore.⁵³ (ibid)

She further says that “[a]nd now there's this big thing, this big project is looming over us, and I didn't think it was possible to do more interventions because they have already done so much”⁵⁴ (ibid). It is also acknowledged that Sámi livelihoods have been negatively impacted by other industries as well, including mining, forestry and wind power projects. Inger-Ann Omma therefore asserts that “[r]eindeer husbandry is very much adapting to the competing land uses that affect our livelihoods already at this point. *It is not possible to adapt more than we do today*”⁵⁵ (Elfström 2013). Similar statements were made by the Saami Council in 2021:

⁵⁰ Own translation.

⁵¹ Own translation, emphasis added.

⁵² Own translation.

⁵³ Own translation.

⁵⁴ Own translation.

⁵⁵ Own translation, emphasis added.

In addition, the [Vapsten] reindeer herding community is already heavily affected by other mining establishments and industrial etc. interventions. These cumulative effects meant that the reindeer herding community was particularly ill-equipped to deal with yet another major intervention.⁵⁶ (Saami Council 2021a)

In other words, the impacts of the mining project in Rönnbäcken cannot be fully understood without considering previous extractive interventions and historical injustices. Some anti-mining actors even portray the Rönnbäcken project in terms of colonization. Jörgen Jonsson, chairman of SSR, argues that:

The colonization of Lapland is not a historical phenomenon [...] *It is happening today, when the Swedish government paves the way for the mining industry in Sápmi*, and it puts our existence at risk. It is motivated by short-term financial interests, [and] foreign companies are allowed to make a profit on Sweden's minerals. We cannot accept it⁵⁷ (SVT Nyheter 2013g).

Persson Njajta also describes the Rönnbäcken project in terms of colonization: “It is a colonial mindset that those old men should sit there and have access to the land for 25 years. It is not their land, but their speculation is allowed to be prioritized over our lives and heritage”⁵⁸ (Sameradion & SVT Sápmi 2016). In 2021, when the use of the green growth narrative among pro-mining advocates became increasingly evident, Persson Njajta instead began to describe the project in terms of green colonialism:

We do not want green colonialism, neither here nor anywhere else. If you let the mineral prices rule, it will result in projects here and in other places in the world where it's completely inappropriate⁵⁹ (Everljung 2021b).

They now use arguments for the [green] transition and push for more exploitations, not only mines but also wind power projects and other things, and there are battery factories and things like that. Then [the Rönnbäcken project] suddenly becomes relevant again. So we from the Sámi side have also said that *we do not want green colonialism, neither here nor anywhere else. If there is anyone who has advocated for the [green] transition, it is a variety of Indigenous movements around the world.*⁶⁰ (Konflikt 2021)

As such, Persson Njajta questions the pro-mining claims that the mine will contribute to the green transition. The need for climate policies is also acknowledged, but she criticizes that Sámi communities are forced to bear the

⁵⁶ Own translation.

⁵⁷ Own translation, emphasis added.

⁵⁸ Own translation.

⁵⁹ Own translation, emphasis added.

⁶⁰ Own translation, emphasis added.

burden for these policies. In response to pro-mining claims that the “not in my backyard” arguments are not valid, Persson Njajta said that “[i]t’s funny how this backyard always ends up in Sápmi”⁶¹ (ibid). She further criticizes that the green transition is pitted against the protection of Sámi culture:

“Don’t you want a phone?” or “yes but when we open this mine then we will let children out of the mines [in other countries]”, that’s quite an indecent argument, and that, I think it’s in poor taste to use that kind of argument while being so blind at home that you don’t see... what is happening in Sápmi, that there is actually an Indigenous people here in Sweden that needs to be protected. And in a way, I also see how the Sámi children’s opportunities to continue living in their areas... they are being cut to pieces, it’s like there is nothing left if you make it impossible... for the Sámi too to live and pass on their heritage.⁶² (ibid)

In sum, it is evident that the environmental justice narrative is dominant in anti-mining narratives. Various Sámi representatives and organizations, supported by environmental organizations, mainly use this narrative to shed light on the various injustices experienced by the Sámi people in Rönnbäcken and elsewhere.

5.2.2 Human-nonhuman interdependency

The human-nonhuman interdependency narrative can also be observed in anti-mining arguments, although it is not as common as the environmental justice narrative. Concerns for Sámi rights are dominant in anti-mining narratives, but the environmental and ecological impacts of mining are also considered:

Many [protesters] have also gotten involved and highlighted the great natural values and endangered species in the area. These are protected by law and the exploitation also endangers the fulfillment of Sweden’s environmental goals, the EU’s water framework directive and Sweden’s commitments in international environmental conventions.⁶³ (Naturskyddsföreningen 2015)

One newspaper article notes that the debates concerning the Rönnbäcken project have been centered around the question of whether mining or reindeer husbandry, understood as public interests, should be prioritized. At the same time, the plans to establish a nature reserve in the area has largely been left out of the debate. Per Nihlén, case officer at the County Administrative Board, commented in 2013 that “[t]here will be a total destruction of the natural values [in Rönnbäcken] if the

⁶¹ Own translation.

⁶² Own translation.

⁶³ Own translation.

mine is established”⁶⁴ (Johansson 2013). SGR and the environmental organizations Skydda Skogen and Fältbiologerna have also argued that a nature reserve in Rönnbäcken should be established to protect the high levels of biodiversity and endangered species in the area (Frygell & Lindahl 2014; SVT Nyheter 2014a). As such, it is, in their view, “absurd” to open a mine in Rönnbäcken as it will destroy important ecological values. In the words of Lisa Behrenfeldt, Skydda Skogen:

When I stood on one of the mountain peaks on Rönnbäcksnäset, I was surrounded by gnarled old pines with the view of the lake and the mountains. It’s completely absurd to think that in a few years this area would be covered in open pits, piles of excavated material, and an industrial area as big as the city of Umeå⁶⁵ (SVT Nyheter 2014a).

Some anti-mining actors also argue that environmental concerns are not sufficiently accounted for in the mining process. For instance, SGR, Skydda Skogen and Fältbiologerna criticized the company’s environmental inventory (ibid). While the anti-mining organizations found 65 endangered species in Rönnbäcken, BlueLake Mineral only identified nine (Frygell & Lindahl 2014). SGR also criticizes Swedish mining legislation:

Today’s mineral policy and mineral legislation is flawed and must be changed. The environmental considerations are still left out until the very end of the process, with a possible trial in the Land and Environment Court.⁶⁶ (SVT Nyheter 2013a)

It is embarrassing for Sweden that the UN must step in and get involved in a mining project. They have also completely overlooked the environmental discussion because it has been left to the end of the prospecting process. [...] It’s a disaster. Environmental considerations come last in the process, and this means that even if it will be shown in the end that the environmental intrusion is too great, the venture capital companies can operate freely for many years and threaten the environment, other jobs and drive a wedge between different [local] groups.⁶⁷ (SVT Nyheter 2013e)

Anti-mining actors also view humans and non-humans as intertwined, at least to some extent. Such ideas are mainly seen in statements about how ecological degradation caused by mining in the area will harm the humans living in the area as well, in particular the Sámi communities. The mining project is viewed as a

⁶⁴ Own translation.

⁶⁵ Own translation.

⁶⁶ Own translation.

⁶⁷ Own translation.

threat to both humans and non-humans, and damages to ecosystems and humans are often described simultaneously:

Huge financial fiascos (e.g. the Northland bankruptcy in Pajala) as well as *ecological and human disasters* with mine dam failures, most recently in Brazil where at least 28 people died, but also in Canada and Finland, show that the risks are real and can have unforeseeable consequences.⁶⁸ (Naturskyddsforeningen 2015)

Ideas of coexistence between humans and non-humans is most evident in descriptions of how Sámi culture depends upon local ecosystems, which several quotes in the previous section illustrate. As expressed by Marie Persson Njajta, “[i]t’s terrible. There won’t be any future left, we won’t be able to live off the land and in harmony with nature as we do now”⁶⁹ (Elfström 2013). The idea that Sámi culture is intimately linked to non-human species and ecosystems is common among anti-mining actors:

The land carries our history but also our future. It carries all the stories, knowledge, we pass on our language... We do that out in the fields. *We belong to the land and if you remove the land then you remove us.*⁷⁰ (Konflikt 2021)

[...] Indigenous peoples’ difference [to non-Indigenous people] fundamentally stems from the fact that *their cultures, societies, ways of life – and ultimately their very identities – are inevitably intertwined with their historical lands.* [...] The [Vapsten] reindeer herding community emphasized that *damage to its historical land and to its culture-based livelihood is damage to fundamental elements such as [Vapsten’s] and its members’ culture, way of life and identities;* damages that are evidently very severe, also in terms of the right to property.⁷¹ (Saami Council 2021a)

As such, the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative is adopted by anti-mining actors in Rönnbäcken, although to a much lesser extent than the environmental justice narrative.

⁶⁸ Own translation, emphasis added.

⁶⁹ Own translation.

⁷⁰ Own translation, emphasis added.

⁷¹ Own translation, emphasis added.

5.3 Power and resistance in Rönnbäcken

The narratives used in the Rönnbäcken case can also be understood in terms of power. As previously stated, two sets of power relations are of interest in this thesis: power relations between the Sámi people and the Swedish mining industry, and power relations between humans and non-humans. This section will analyze if, and if so how, the narratives in Rönnbäcken promote or challenge these power relations.

5.3.1 Power relations between the Sámi people and the Swedish mining industry

Pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken are arguably contributing to colonial power asymmetries between the Sámi people and the Swedish mining industry. As demonstrated above, the critique posed by CERD as well as Sámi and environmental groups are largely dismissed. While pro-mining narratives acknowledge the importance of coexistence, dialogue and finding common ground, they widely reject anti-mining claims that the Rönnbäcken mining project is discriminatory. Rather, it is assumed that environmental and social concerns, and respect for Indigenous rights, are considered and respected almost by default.

The use of the extractive exceptionalist narrative among pro-mining actors can in itself be seen as an expression of colonial power. As previously outlined, extractive exceptionalism necessitates a kind of “colonial forgetfulness” that strategically downplay anti-extractive and anti-colonial critique and alternative understandings of the social and environmental consequences of mining (de Leeuw 2023: 73). Anti-mining narratives that depict mining in Rönnbäcken as a violation of Indigenous rights are incompatible with the extractive exceptionalist story and are therefore outright dismissed.

The rejection of the criticism also illustrates the pro-mining narratives’ failure to acknowledge reindeer husbandry as an *Indigenous* cultural practice. First, pro-mining narratives assert that the Vapsten reindeer herding community has failed to provide evidence of “ethnic” discrimination. By doing this, pro-mining narratives not only dismiss Sámi experiences of discrimination, but they also undervalue Sámi culture by conflating ethnicity with Indigeneity. While ethnic markers separate groups of people more generally based on symbols and other forms of identification, Indigenous identities are inherently political and based on historical colonial relations between a people and a colonial state. The associated needs of Indigenous communities are therefore fundamentally different from those of ethnic minorities (Williams & Schertzer 2019: 679-681). As such, by rejecting the critique, and describing it in terms of ethnicity, pro-mining narratives

in Rönnbäcken also fail to acknowledge reindeer herding as an Indigenous cultural practice with its associated rights.

Second, the issue is repeatedly described in terms of opposing “interests”, which can further be seen as a failure to acknowledge the special position and historical identity of the Sámi as an Indigenous community. The Vapsten reindeer herding community is reduced to a special interest group, and reindeer husbandry is seen as an interest among others. This further justifies the prioritization of other interests for “the public good”, such as green technologies and local economic development, at the expense of the reindeer husbandry (Lawrence 2014: 1045). As such, Sámi concerns and livelihoods are largely excluded from the pro-mining narratives.

However, one might argue that pro-mining narratives challenge power relations to some extent because of the adoption of the environmental justice narrative, in which the unequal global distribution of responsibilities and costs in the green transition is criticized. On the other hand, the use of this narrative is limited, and it concerns power relations that are not discussed in this thesis. Rather, the use of the environmental justice narrative can be seen as an attempt to shift focus away from the criticism posed by local and international actors. The environmental justice narrative may thus in this sense contribute to power asymmetries between the Sámi people and the Swedish mining industry.

In contrast to the pro-mining narratives, the environmental justice narrative used by anti-mining actors can be interpreted as an act of resistance. The messages conveyed in these narratives are all centered around how the local Sámi communities are mistreated and how the mining project in Rönnbäcken must be understood in a wider context of exploitation in Sápmi. These narratives shed light on Sámi experiences – for instance their experiences of the mining project as an existential threat and as a continuation of historical (colonial) exploitative practices – which in itself can be seen as acts of resistance to the pro-mining narratives that generally exclude Sámi perspectives.

Furthermore, anti-mining narratives highlight how Sweden fails to acknowledge international and local criticism. For instance, these narratives criticize Sweden’s self-identity as a “constitutional state” and its lack of inclusion of Indigenous and environmental concerns in mining processes. They also claim that the Swedish state has an outright “disdain” for Sámi rights. As such, the anti-mining narratives challenge ideas of extractive exceptionalism, as well as Swedish exceptionalism more generally. These narratives also challenge the green growth narrative by framing the calls for “green” mining in Rönnbäcken as “green colonialism”. Thus, the environmental justice narrative is used as a counter-narrative to the pro-mining narratives and can be interpreted as a form of resistance to the power relations between the Sámi and the mining industry.

5.3.2 Power relations between non-humans and humans

One might also argue that the pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken promote anthropocentric power asymmetries between humans and non-humans, mainly due to the exploitative notions of “nature” as an object that are embedded in both the extractive exceptionalist and green growth narratives. Several indications of such notions could be identified. For instance, the pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken assert that environmental degradation is unfortunate, but it is not ascribed much significance. Some even state that the environmental costs – the destruction of local ecosystems – are a necessary price to pay to achieve local development and the green transition. Environmental dimensions are mostly described in technical terms, for instance by stating that local ecosystems will be protected through “environmentally efficient operations”. Taken altogether, these examples suggest an instrumental and exploitative notion of “nature”. Furthermore, it is repeatedly emphasized that environmental protection is important in the mining process, but it is often described as important simply because it is required by law. The pro-mining narratives thus seem to be less concerned about the life and well-being of non-humans.

Despite the arguments of the importance of the green transition, non-humans are systematically excluded from the green growth narrative. The mine is described as strategically important, and corporate representatives highlight that mineral companies such as Bluelake Mineral must adapt to the new global market demands created by the green transition. At the same time, the green growth narrative, as adopted by pro-mining actors, does not include climate or ecological dimensions of the green transition. The green growth narrative may thus be interpreted as an attempt to reframe the project in Rönnbäcken as a “green” initiative to further legitimize socially and environmentally harmful mining practices (Össbo 2023: 117). This also illustrates the postcolonial-ecocritical critique that the green growth narrative’s claims to advocate for both economic development *and* ecological sustainability is an illusion, as they tend to favor economic and, in the Rönnbäcken case, geopolitical interests. Consequently, the green growth narrative promotes environmental destruction and continued human dominance over non-humans in Rönnbäcken.

Contrary to the pro-mining narratives, the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative, which was adopted to some extent by anti-mining actors, may be understood as a counter-narrative in which anthropocentric power relations are challenged. The use of this narrative can be interpreted as an attempt to illuminate that non-human species and ecosystems are valuable in their own right. For instance, it is argued that environmental protection needs to be improved in mining processes, that Rönnbäcken should be turned into a nature reserve, and that Rönnbäcken holds great ecological values. The anti-mining narratives also criticize that the ecological impacts are considered too late in the mining process, which allows environmental degradation to proceed for years. As such, the

human-nonhuman interdependency narrative may be understood as a form of resistance to anthropocentric power relations in Rönnebäcken.

However, this narrative is not used as much as the environmental justice narrative, and the resistance is thus limited. Further, the importance of protecting non-human species and ecosystems is mainly discussed in combination with concerns for Sámi rights. The idea that Sámi culture coexist with, and depend upon, non-humans in Rönnebäcken is repeatedly conveyed, which can be seen as a counter-narrative to more anthropocentric and hierarchical notions of “human-nature” relations. However, emphasis is still overwhelmingly placed on the humans in this relationship. Arguably, then, the ways in which the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative is used by anti-mining actors in Rönnebäcken entail some resistance to the prevailing human-nonhuman relations, but it is limited due to the minimal usage of this narrative as well as its anthropocentric elements. Similarly, the environmental justice narrative, as adopted in anti-mining narratives, is also centered around humans because of its focus on injustices experienced by the Sámi people.

As such, neither of the narratives adopted by pro- and anti-mining actors offer any substantial resistance to anthropocentric human-nonhuman relations, although the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative challenges these power relations to some extent. This illustrates the dominance of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism even in narratives that argue for increased ecological protection (DeLoughrey & Handley 2011: 12).

6 Concluding discussion

The findings of this thesis illustrate that there are significant differences between the pro- and anti-mining narratives used in the Rönnebäcken mining project (2013-2024). Extractive exceptionalist and green growth narratives were identified in pro-mining arguments in Rönnebäcken, although there are differences in the extent to which they are used. Some elements of the environmental justice narrative could also be observed, but these were not as prominent. In contrast, the environmental justice narrative is widely used by anti-mining actors, as well as the human-nonhuman interdependency narrative, although to a lesser extent.

The use of these four different narratives further illustrated the workings of power in the Rönnebäcken case, more specifically how the narratives could either promote or resist prevailing power relations. The findings indicate that pro-mining narratives contribute to the colonial power asymmetries between the Sámi people and the Swedish mining industry, while anti-mining narratives, by adopting the environmental justice narrative, provided substantial resistance to this power relation. However, both pro- and anti-mining narratives promoted anthropocentric power relations between humans and non-humans, mainly since they largely privilege human perspectives at the expense of non-humans. The human-nonhuman interdependency narrative adopted in anti-mining narratives can be seen as a counter-narrative that challenges such assumptions, although this resistance is much weaker compared to resistance to the power asymmetries between the Sámi and the mining industry.

The analysis illustrates that power and resistance in the Rönnebäcken case fundamentally relates to questions of how Rönnebäcken – both the area and the project – should be interpreted. There are differences regarding *what Rönnebäcken is a case of*: is it a case of green growth or green colonialism? Does it entail non-intrusive, socially, and environmentally beneficial activities or is it a human rights violation? Perceptions also differ with regards to *what Rönnebäcken is*: is it rich in natural resources or life? Should it be understood in terms of “nature” that ought to be exploited or as biodiverse ecosystems that local communities depend upon? These differences essentially capture the roots of the conflict.

Is it possible, then, to reconcile the different values and ideas underlying the conflict in Rönnebäcken? There are no easy answers to this question, but this thesis indicates that there are fundamental differences that effectively hinders solutions. Some suggestions can be made. In particular, the parties involved need to be more attentive to the local Sámi’s concerns, for instance by avoiding treating the conflict in terms of “opposing interests” and better acknowledge the Sámi’s status

as an Indigenous people. Any attempt to find *just* solutions to the conflicts that arise in green energy projects must therefore pay attention to the different values and ideas that the actors involved build their arguments around, which has also been highlighted by previous research. The findings of this thesis also illustrate the need to address power asymmetries embedded in green energy conflicts such as Rönnbäcken.

As a final note, it should once again be noted that it has not been my intention to provide the one “true” understanding of the mining conflict in Rönnbäcken. Rather, it is merely one of many possible interpretations, and there are many other aspects that further research may investigate, such as the geopolitical dimensions of the green transition, or how global power relations are resisted or promoted in “green” extractive projects.

7 Literature list

- Agusdinata, Datu Buyung, Wenjuan Liu, Hallie Eakin & Hugo Romero, 2018. “Socio-environmental impacts of lithium mineral extraction: towards a research agenda”, *Environmental Research Letters* 13, 123001.
- Amber, Candice, Sandeep Agrawal & Celine Zoe, 2023. “Just transition in the northwest territories: Insights and values from indigenous and non-indigenous northerners”, *Heliyon* 9, e18837, 1–11.
- Amnesty International, 2023. “GRUVLAG I EU HOTAR DET SAMISKA FOLKETS MÄNSKLIGA RÄTTIGHETER”. 21 December 2023. https://www.amnesty.se/aktuellt/gruvlag-i-eu-hotar-det-samiska-folkets-manskliga-rattigheter/?fbclid=IwAR2wCUGNRCP905ZEF-QZC31WBmDYbeTXYIw_9R5645tj3YEIYL_YdcWffY (Accessed: 22 January 2024).
- Barnett, Michael & Raymond Duvall, 2005. “Power in global governance”, in Michael Barnett & Raymond Duvall (eds.) *Power in Global Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–32.
- Beland Lindahl, Karin, Andreas Johansson, Anna Zachrisson & Roine Viklund, 2018. “Competing pathways to sustainability? Exploring conflicts over mine establishments in the Swedish mountain region”, *Journal of Environmental Management* 218, 402–415.
- Beland Lindahl, Karin, Anna Zachrisson, Roine Viklund, Simon Matti & Daniel Fjällborg, 2016. *Fjällnära Gruvdrift? Konflikter om vägar till hållbarhet*. Luleå: Luleå University of Technology.
- Bergman Rosamond, Annika, 2020. “Music, mining and colonisation: Sámi contestations of Sweden’s self-narrative”, *Tidskriftet POLITIK* 23(1), 70–87.
- Bhambra, Gurminder K., 2014. “Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues”, *Postcolonial Studies* 17(2), 115–121.
- Biswas Mellamphy, Nandita & Jacob Vangeest, 2024. “Human, all too human? Anthropocene narratives, posthumanisms, and the problem of ‘post-anthropocentrism’”, *The Anthropocene Review* [ahead of print], 1–15.
- Bluelake Mineral, 2024a. “About us”. <https://www.bluelakemineral.com/en/corporate/about-us/> (Accessed: 15 February 2024).
- Bluelake Mineral, 2024b. “Nickel”. <https://www.bluelakemineral.com/en/projects/nickel/> (Accessed: 2 February 2024).
- Boyd, Eric, 2023. “Memorialisation and its denial: slow resistance through derealisation in Kiruna, Sweden”, *Journal of Political Power* 16(2), 158–176.

- CERD = United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2020. *Opinion adopted by the Committee under article 14 of the Convention, concerning communication No. 54/2013*. CERD/C/102/D/54/2013. 18 December 2020.
- Cilano, Cara & Elizabeth DeLoughrey, 2007. “Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism”, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 14(1), 71–87.
- Ciplet, David & Jill Lindsey Harrison, 2020. “Transition tensions: mapping conflicts in movements for a just and sustainable transition”, *Environmental Politics* 29(3), 435–456.
- Cudworth, Erika & Stephen Hobden, 2017. “Introduction”, in Erika Cudworth & Stephen Hobden (eds.) *The Emancipatory Project of Posthumanism*. 1st edition. London: Routledge, 1–17.
- Dale, Gareth, Manu V. Mathai & Jose A. Puppim de Oliveira, 2016. “Introduction”, in Gareth Dale, Manu V. Mathai & Jose A. Puppim de Oliveira (eds.) *Green Growth: Ideology, Political Economy and the Alternatives*. London: Zed Books, 1–19.
- Death, Carl, 2013. “Critical, environmental, political”, in Carl Death (ed.) *Critical Environmental Politics*. 1st edition. London: Routledge, 1–12.
- De Fina, Anna & Alexandra Georgakopoulou, 2011. *Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.
- de Leeuw, Georgia, 2023. “The virtue of extraction and decolonial recollection in Gállok, Sápmi”, in Adrián Groglopo & Julia Suárez-Krabbe (eds.) *Coloniality and Decolonisation in the Nordic Region*. 1st edition. London: Routledge, 68–88.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth & George B. Handley, 2011. “Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of the Earth”, in Elizabeth DeLoughrey & George B. Handley (eds.) *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Oxford University Press, 3–40.
- Dorn, Felix Malte, Robert Hafner & Christina Plank, 2022. “Towards a climate change consensus: How mining and agriculture legitimize green extractivism in Argentina”, *The Extractive Industries and Society* 11, 101130, 1–10.
- Drugge, Anna-Lill, 2016. “How Can We Do it Right? Ethical Uncertainty in Swedish Sami Research”, *Journal of Academic Ethics* 14, 263–279.
- Dürbeck, Gabriele, 2019. “Narratives of the Anthropocene: From the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental humanities”, in Monika Albrecht (ed.) *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined: Multidirectional Perspectives on Imperial and Colonial Pasts and the Neocolonial Present*. London: Routledge, 271–288.
- Fernandes, Sabrina, 2024. “‘Just’ Means ‘Just’ Everywhere: How Extractivism Stands in the Way of an Internationalist Paradigm for Just Transitions”, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*.
- Ferrante, Alessandro & Daniele Sartori, 2016. “From Anthropocentrism to Post-humanism in the Educational Debate”, *Relations: Beyond Anthropocentrism* 4(2), 175–194.

- Finn, Kate R. & Christina A.W. Stanton, 2022. “The (Un)just Use of Transition Minerals: How Efforts to Achieve a Low-Carbon Economy Continue to Violate Indigenous Rights”, *Colorado Environmental Law Journal* 33(2), 341–377.
- Fjellheim, Eva Maria, 2023. “Wind Energy on Trial in Saepmie: Epistemic Controversies and Strategic Ignorance in Norway’s Green Energy Transition”, *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 14, 140–168.
- FLH = Forum för levande historia, n.d. ”Texter om rasbiologi”. <https://www.levandehistoria.se/undervisningsmaterial/omanskligt-2/introduktion/texter> (Accessed: 15 May 2024).
- Fournier, Cathy, Suzanne Stewart, Joshua Adams, Clayton Shirt & Esha Mahabir, 2023. “Systemic disruptions: decolonizing indigenous research ethics using indigenous knowledges”, *Research Ethics* 19(3), 325-340.
- Hayward, Clarissa & Steven Lukes, 2008. “Nobody to shoot? Power, structure, and agency: A dialogue”, *Journal of Power* 1(1), 5–20.
- Henriksen, John B., 2008. “The continuous process of recognition and implementation of the Sami people’s right to self-determination”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 21(1), 27–40.
- Hickel, Jason, 2020. *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*. London: William Heinemann.
- Hickel, Jason, 2021. “The anti-colonial politics of degrowth”, *Political Geography* 88, 102404, 1–3.
- Hickel, Jason & Giorgos Kallis, 2020. “Is Green Growth Possible?”, *New Political Economy* 25(4), 469–486.
- Hobden, Stephen, 2013. “Posthumanism”, in Carl Death (ed.) *Critical Environmental Politics*. 1st edition. London: Routledge, 175–183.
- Huggan, Graham & Helen Tiffin, 2015. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Jones, Michael D., Mark K. McBeth & Elizabeth A. Shanahan, 2014. “Introducing the Narrative Policy Framework”, in Michael D. Jones, Elizabeth A. Shanahan & Mark K. McBeth (eds.) *The Science of Stories: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework in Public Policy Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–25.
- Juutilainen, Sandra & Lydia Heikkilä, 2016. “Moving forward with Sámi research ethics: how the dialogical process to policy development in Canada supports the course of action for the Nordic countries”, in Anna-Lill Drugge (ed.) *Ethics in Indigenous Research: Past Experiences - Future Challenges*. Umeå: Vaartoe – Centre for Sami Research, 81–104.
- Karam, Anne & Shayan Shokrgozar, 2023. “‘We have been invaded’: Wind energy sacrifice zones in Åfjord Municipality and their implications for Norway”, *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift–Norwegian Journal of Geography* 77(3), 183–196.
- Kejerhag, Jenny, 2022. “Planer på en nickelgruva i Rönnbäcken återupptas”. *Dagens Nyheter*. 11 June 2022. <https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/planer-pa-en-nickelgruva-i-ronnbacken-aterupptas/> (Accessed: 22 January 2024).

- Khan, Jamil, Bengt Johansson & Roger Hildingsson, 2021. "Strategies for greening the economy in three Nordic countries", *Environmental Policy and Governance* 31, 592–604.
- Kinnvall, Catarina, 2020. "Postcolonialism", in Didier Bigo, Thomas Diez, Evangelos Fanoulis, Ben Rosamond & Yannis A. Stivachtis (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies*. London: Routledge, 72–84.
- Kløcker Larsen, Rasmus, Maria Boström, Muonio Reindeer Herding District, Vilhelmina Södra Reindeer Herding District, Voernese Reindeer Herding District & Jenny Wik-Karlsson, 2022. "The impacts of mining on Sámi lands: A knowledge synthesis from three reindeer herding districts", *The Extractive Industries and Society* 9, 101051, 1–10.
- Koivurova, Timo, Vladimir Masloboev, Kamrul Hossain, Vigdis Nygaard, Anna Petrétei & Svetlana Vinogradova, 2015. "Legal Protection of Sami Traditional Livelihoods from the Adverse Impacts of Mining: A Comparison of the Level of Protection Enjoyed by Sami in Their Four Home States", *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 6(1), 11–51.
- Köppel, Jonas & Morgan Scoville-Simonds, 2024. "What should 'we' do? Subjects and scales in the double-bind between energy transition and lithium extraction", *The Extractive Industries and Society* 17, 101376, 1–9.
- Lalander, Rickard & Maija Merimaa, 2018. "The Discursive Paradox of Environmental Conflict: Between Ecologism and Economism in Ecuador", *Forum for Development Studies* 45(3), 485–511.
- Lawrence, Rebecca, 2014. "Internal colonisation and Indigenous resource sovereignty: wind power developments on traditional Saami lands", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, 1036–1053.
- Lawrence, Rebecca & Rasmus Kløcker Larsen, 2017. "The politics of planning: assessing the impacts of mining on Sami lands", *Third World Quarterly* 38(5), 1164–1180.
- Lawrence, Rebecca & Sara Moritz, 2019. "Mining industry perspectives on indigenous rights: Corporate complacency and political uncertainty", *The Extractive Industries and Society* 6, 41–49.
- Lawrence, Rebecca & Ulf Mörkenstam, 2016. "Indigenous Self-determination through a Government Agency? The Impossible Task of the Swedish Sámediggi", *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 23, 105–127.
- Lawrence, Rebecca & Mattias Åhrén, 2016. "Mining as colonisation: The need for restorative justice and restitution of traditional Sami lands", in Lesley Head, Katarina Saltzman, Gunhild Setten & Marie Stenseke (eds.) *Nature, Temporality and Environmental Management: Scandinavian and Australian perspectives on peoples and landscapes*. London: Routledge, 149–166.
- Lindmark, Daniel, 2013. "Colonial Encounter in Early Modern Sápmi", in Magdalena Naum & Jonas Nordin (eds.) *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*. New York: Springer New York, 131–146.

- Lohmann, Larry, 2016. "What is the 'green' in 'green growth'?", in Gareth Dale, Manu V. Mathai & Jose A. Puppim de Oliveira (eds.) *Green Growth: Ideology, Political Economy and the Alternatives*. London: Zed Books, 42–71.
- Loomba, Ania, 2015. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. 3rd edition. London: Routledge.
- Malmberg, Åsa, 2021. "Så drabbades samerna av den rasbiologiska forskningen". Uppsala University. 8 December 2021. <https://www.uu.se/nyheter/arkiv/2021-12-08-sa-drabbades-samerna-av-den-rasbiologiska-forskningen> (Accessed: 26 February 2024).
- Marland, Pippa, 2013. "Ecocriticism", *Literature Compass* 10(11), 846–868.
- Marsh, David, Selen A. Ercan & Paul Furlong, 2018. "A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science", in Vivien Lowndes, David Marsh & Gerry Stoker (eds.) *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. 4th edition. London: Palgrave, 177–198.
- Nachet, Louise, Caitlynn Beckett & Kristina Sehlin MacNeil, 2022. "Framing extractive violence as environmental (in)justice: A cross-perspective from indigenous lands in Canada and Sweden", *The Extractive Industries and Society* 12, 100949, 1–9.
- Newell, Peter J., Frank W. Geels & Benjamin K. Sovacool, 2022. "Navigating tensions between rapid and just low-carbon transitions", *Environmental Research Letters* 17, 041006, 1–5.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: Currey.
- Nixon, Rob, 2014. "The Great Acceleration and the Great Divergence: Vulnerability in the Anthropocene", *Profession*. March 2014. <https://profession.mla.org/the-great-acceleration-and-the-great-divergence-vulnerability-in-the-anthropocene/> (Accessed: 7 February 2024).
- Ojala, Carl-Gösta & Jonas M. Nordin, 2015. "Mining Sápmi: Colonial Histories, Sámi Archaeology, and the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Northern Sweden", *Arctic Anthropology* 52(2), 6–21.
- Patterson, Molly & Kristen Renwick Monroe, 1998. "Narrative in political science", *Annual Review of Political Science* 1(1), 315–331.
- Persson, Sofia, David Harnesk & Mine Islar, 2017. "What local people? Examining the Gállok mining conflict and the rights of the Sámi population in terms of justice and power", *Geoforum* 86, 20–29.
- Pitron, Guillame, 2022. "The Geopolitics of the Rare-Metals Race", *The Washington Quarterly* 45(1), 135–150.
- Qoyyimah, Uswatun, 2023. "Handling translations of data for qualitative research", *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 5(1), 1–12.
- Raitio, Kaisa, Christina Allard & Rebecca Lawrence, 2020. "Mineral extraction in Swedish Sápmi: The regulatory gap between Sami rights and Sweden's mining permitting practices", *Land Use Policy* 99, 105001, 1–15.
- Resnik, David B., 2022. "Environmental justice and climate change policies", *Bioethics* 36, 735–741.
- Riessman, Catherine Kohler, 2008. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. London: SAGE.

- Robertson, Alexa, 2012. "Narrativanalys", in Göran Bergström & Kristina Boréus (eds.) *Textens mening och makt: Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. 3rd edition. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 219–262.
- Sámi Parliament [in Sweden], 2022. "Kontaktuppgifter till Sveriges samebyar". 9 September 2022. <https://www.sametinget.se/samebyar> (Accessed: 15 May 2024).
- Sámi Parliament [in Sweden], 2024. "Samerna i Sverige". 8 February 2024. <https://www.sametinget.se/samer> (Accessed: 16 February 2024).
- Schmidlehner, Michael Franz, 2023. "The green growth narrative, bioeconomy and the foreclosure of nature", *Sustainability Science* 18, 723–736.
- Schmitt, Casey R., 2023. "Anthropomorphism, anthropocentrism, and human-orientation in environmental discourse", *Journal of Language and Politics* 22(5), 601–621.
- SI 1 = Samiskt informationscentrum, n.d. "Näringsar". Sámi Parliament [in Sweden]. <https://www.samer.se/naringar> (Accessed: 16 February 2024).
- SI 2 = Samiskt informationscentrum, n.d. "Sápmi". Sámi Parliament [in Sweden]. <https://www.samer.se/sapmi> (Accessed: 16 February 2024).
- SSR = Svenska Samernas Riksförbund, n.d. "Om SSR". <https://www.sapmi.se/om-ssr/> (Accessed: 17 May 2024).
- Strambo, Claudia & Ana Carolina González Espinosa, 2020. "Extraction and development: fossil fuel production narratives and counternarratives in Colombia", *Climate Policy* 20(8), 931–948.
- Tarras-Wahlberg, Håkan & John Southalan, 2022. "Mining and indigenous rights in Sweden: what is at stake and the role for legislation", *Mineral Economics* 35, 239–252.
- Tunón, Håkan, Marie Kvarnström & Henrik Lerner, 2016. "Ethical codes of conduct for research related to Indigenous peoples and local communities – core principles, challenges and opportunities", in Anna-Lill Drugge (ed.) *Ethics in Indigenous Research: Past Experiences - Future Challenges*. Umeå: Vaartoe – Centre for Sami Research, 57–80.
- UNFCCC = United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2024. "COP 28: What Was Achieved and What Happens Next?". 12 January 2024. <https://unfccc.int/cop28/5-key-takeaways> (Accessed: 8 May 2024).
- Uppsala University, 2024. "Rasbiologiska institutets arkiv". 26 April 2024. <https://www.uu.se/bibliotek/hitta-material/hitta-via-materialtyp/handskrifter-brev-och-arkivmaterial/rasbiologiska-institutets-arkiv> (Accessed: 15 May 2024).
- Vromen, Ariadne, 2018. "Qualitative Methods", in Vivien Lowndes, David Marsh & Gerry Stoker (eds.) *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. 4th edition. London: Palgrave, 237–253.
- West, Helga, 2021. "Om jag vill utgöra ditt forskningsmaterial? I helvete heller!", in Patricia Fjellgren & Malin Nord (eds.) *Inifrån Sápmi: vittnesmål från stulet land*. Verbal förlag, 199–204.
- Whyte, Kyle, 2017. "Indigenous climate change studies: Indigenizing futures, decolonizing the Anthropocene", *English Language Notes* 55(1-2), 153–162.

- Williams, Marc, 2012. “Knowledge, power and global environmental policy”, in Peter Dauvergne (ed.) *Handbook of Global Environmental Politics*. 2nd edition. Edward Elgar Publishing, 443–454.
- Williams, Meaghan & Robert Schertzer, 2019. “Is Indigeneity like Ethnicity? Theorizing and Assessing Models of Indigenous Political Representation”, *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 52, 677–696.
- Wilson, Gary N. & Christina Allard, 2023. “Institutional Determinants of Mining Projects in Canada and Sweden: Insights from the Prosperity and Kallak Cases”, *Environmental Management* 72, 53–69.
- Zhou, Ronghui (Kevin) & David Brown, 2024. “Epistemic justice and critical minerals—Towards a planetary just transition”, *The Extractive Industries and Society* 18, 101463, 1–8.
- Össbo, Åsa, 2020. “Från lappmarksplakat till anläggsamhällen: Svensk bosättarkolonialism gentemot Sápmi”, *Historisk tidskrift* 140(3), 420–443.
- Össbo, Åsa, 2023. “Back to Square One. Green Sacrifice Zones in Sápmi and Swedish Policy Responses to Energy Emergencies”, *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 14, 112–134.

7.1 Material

- Bergström, Lina & Berno Jonsson, 2013. “Ett mänskligt övergrepp”. *SVT Nyheter*. 13 November 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/ett-manskligt-overgrepp> (Accessed: 21 March 2024). (no. 22)
- Bluelake Mineral, 2024c. “CSR”. <https://www.bluelakemineral.com/en/corporate/csr/> (Accessed: 28 February 2024).
- Bluelake Mineral, 2024d. “Environment”. <https://www.bluelakemineral.com/en/corporate/environment/> (Accessed: 6 May 2024).
- Elfström, Calle, 2013. “Regeringens dilemma: Gruvor eller renkötsel”. *SVT Nyheter*. Last updated 9 November 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/regeringens-dilemma-nya-jobb-mot-miljon> (Accessed: 13 March 2024). (no. 6)
- Everljung, Johan, 2021a. “Batteribranschen skriker efter metaller – kritiserade gruvplaner i Rönnbäcken igång igen”. *SVT Nyheter*. 21 October 2021. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/stigande-metallpriser-vacker-intresset-igen-for-nickelgruva-utanfor-tarnaby> (Accessed: 2 February 2024). (no. 45)
- Everljung, Johan, 2021b. “Marie Persson Njajta kämpar mot gruvplanerna i Rönnbäcken: ‘Vill inte ha grön kolonialism’”. *SVT Nyheter*. 21 October 2021. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/vill-inte-ha-gron-kolonialism-har-eller-nagon-annanstans> (Accessed: 19 January 2024). (no. 46)

- Everljung, Johan, 2023. "Sverige vill säkra egen brytning av kobolt – största fyndigheten i Rönnbäcken". *SVT Nyheter*. 1 September 2023. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/sverige-vill-sakra-egen-brytning-av-kobolt-storsta-fyndigheten-i-ronnbacken> (Accessed: 31 January 2024). (no. 48)
- Frygell, Moa & Kajsa Lindahl, 2014. "Flera hotade arter i gruvområde". *SVT Nyheter*. 28 August 2014. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/hotade-arter-i-gruvomrade> (Accessed: 16 February 2024). (no. 35)
- Heikki, Jörgen, 2014. "Sverige avvisar FN-anmälan om Rönnbäcken - Åhrén ej överraskad". *Sameradion*. 3 February 2014. <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/5774336> (Accessed: 25 March 2024).
- Johansson, Tobias, 2013. "Omtvistad gruva kan hejdas av naturreservat". *SVT Nyheter*. 21 October 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/omtvistad-gruva-kan-hejdas-av-naturreservat> (Accessed: 15 February 2024). (no. 23)
- Konflikt, 2021. "Batteriboomens baksida – den vilda jakten på kobolt". *Sveriges Radio*. 22 October 2021. <https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/batteriboomens-baksida-den-vilda-jakten-pa-kobolt> (Accessed: 23 January 2024).
- Müller, Arne & Moa Frygell, 2013. "UN: Stop the mining in Sweden". *SVT Nyheter*. 9 November 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/un-stop-the-mining-in-sweden> (Accessed: 15 February 2024). (no. 26)
- Naturskyddsföreningen, 2015. "Öppet brev till Nickel Mountains ledning, aktieägare och bolagsstämma". 16 November 2015. <https://vasterbotten.naturskyddsforeningen.se/2015/11/16/oppet-brev-till-nickel-mountains-ledning-aktieagare-och-bolagsstamma/> (Accessed: 25 January 2024).
- NMG = Nickel Mountain Group AB, 2014. *NMG: The Swedish Government states that Vapsten's complaint to CERD should be declared inadmissible*. Press release. 12 February 2014. <https://mb.cision.com/Main/852/9535981/209860.pdf> (Accessed: 5 April 2024).
- NMR = Nickel Mountain Resources AB, 2014. *Årsredovisning för Nickel Mountain Resources AB (publ)*. 11 June 2014. <https://www.bluelakemineral.com/media/204917/sigerad-a-r-nmr-ab-2013.pdf> (Accessed: 5 April 2024).
- Poggats, Tobias, 2020. "Nickelmountain AB: Vi delar inte alla slutsatser i dokumentet". *Sameradion & SVT Sápmi*. 8 December 2020. <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7619621> (Accessed: 1 February 2024).
- Saami Council, 2021a. *Kommentar till FN:s Rasdiskrimineringskommittés avgörande i Vapsten sameby v. Sverige (Rönnbäckenavgörandet)*. <https://www.saamicouncil.net/news-archive/sweden-ignores-decision-from-un-treaty-body-on-discrimination-in-swedish-legislation> (Accessed: 19 January 2024).
- Saami Council, 2021b. *Open letter from the Saami Council and Vapsten Sami Reindeer Herding Community with respect to the Swedish government's*

- response to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's decision in Vapsten Sami Reindeer Herding Community v. Sweden*. 16 June 2021. <https://www.saamicouncil.net/news-archive/sweden-ignores-decision-from-un-treaty-body-on-discrimination-in-swedish-legislation> (Accessed: 19 January 2024).
- Sameradion & SVT Sápmi, 2016. "Fortsatt gruvdrift i Rönnbäcken upprör". 5 January 2016. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/fortsatt-gruvdrift-i-ronnbacken-uppror> (Accessed: 22 March 2024). **(no. 43)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2013a. "'Andrum' efter FN:s ingripande mot gruvplaner". 9 November 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/andrum-efter-fn-s-ingripande-mot-gruvplaner> (Accessed: 21 March 2024). **(no. 25)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2013b. "Fortsätter satsa på Rönnbäcken". 9 November 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/ronnbacken-fortsatt-fokus> (Accessed: 21 March 2024). **(no. 28)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2013c. "Kommunalsråd avvaktar UD-svar". 9 November 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/gruvan-inte-livsviktig> (Accessed: 22 March 2024). **(no. 29)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2013d. "Marie Persson: 'Känns ju skönt'". 31 July 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/marie-persson-kanns-ju-skont> (Accessed: 21 March 2024). **(no. 8)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2013e. "'Pinsamt för Sverige'". 9 November 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/marie-persson> (Accessed: 21 March 2024). **(no. 27)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2013f. "Samer stämmer Sverige inför FN". 13 November 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/stammer-sverige-infor-fn> (Accessed: 15 February 2024). **(no. 21)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2013g. "Skarp gruvkritik: 'Den sätter vår existens på spel'". 18 September 2013. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/skarp-gruvkritik-den-satter-var-existens-pa-spel> (Accessed: 14 March 2024). **(no. 19)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2014a. "Kritiken mot gruvplaner växer". 28 August 2014. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/kritiken-mot-gruvplaner-vaxer> (Accessed: 22 March 2024). **(no. 34)**
- SVT Nyheter, 2014b. "Renägarna förlorade igen". 31 October 2014. <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/renagarna-forlorade-igen> (Accessed: 15 February 2024). **(no. 40)**

Appendix I: Overview of the material (*SVT Nyheter*)

Presented below is an overview of the articles published by *SVT Nyheter* (2009-2023) in chronological order, indicated by numbers. The information provided includes the name of the author of each article (surnames only), as well as the year each article was published. Articles with two different years (e.g. 1. Müller (2009/2013)) have been updated since they were first published. Titles are also included. **Articles in bold are used as material in the analysis.** *Articles in italics are not used as material but provide context to the thesis.* All articles used are referenced in the literature list (7.1 Material). The numbers in the table are also included in the literature list.

All articles published by *SVT Nyheter* concerning the mining project in Rönnebäcken are available at: <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/om/ronnbacksgruvan>

1. Müller (2009/2013) Lönsam gruvdrift för Västerbotten	2. Müller (2010/2013) Steg mot gruva i Rönnebäcken	3. Holm (2011/2013) Vapsten överklagar regeringsbeslut	4. Frygell (2011/2013) Oro i Rönnebäcken	5. Müller (2011/2013) Finansoron försenar Rönnebäcksgruvan
6. Elfström (2012/2013) Regeringens dilemma: Gruvor eller renskötsel	7. Müller (2013) Gruva i Rönnebäcken läggs på is	8. SVT Nyheter (2013) Marie Persson: "Känns ju skönt"	9. SVT Nyheter (2013) Vapstens sameby: "Faran inte över"	10. SVT/TT (2013) Gruvprojekt skjuts på framtiden
11. Müller (2013) Fortsatt arbete i långsam takt enligt Rönnebäckens vd	12. Müller (2013) Gruvbolag anmält efter guldsatsning	13. SVT Nyheter (2013) Demonstrerade mot gruvboomen	14. Müller (2013) Fortsatt kaos i Rönnebäckensbolag	15. SVT Nyheter (2013) Husrannsakan mot gruvbolaget IGE
16. Müller (2013) Konsultföretag köper in sig i Rönnebäcken	17. SVT Nyheter (2013) Regeringen säger ja till omstridd gruvbrytning	18. Müller (2013) Dyr väg till gruvstart	19. SVT Nyheter (2013) Skarp gruvkritik: "Den sätter vår existens på spel"	20. SVT Nyheter (2013) Anja Pärson kritiserar gruvbrytning
21. SVT Nyheter	22. Bergström & Jonsson (2013)	23. Johansson (2013)	24. Müller & Assmundsson	25. SVT Nyheter (2013)

<i>(2013)</i> Samer stämmer Sverige inför FN	”Ett mänskligt övergrepp”	<i>Omtvistad gruva kan hejdas av naturreservat</i>	(2013) FN: Stoppa gruvan i Rönnbäcken	”Andrum” efter FN:s ingripande mot gruvplaner
26. Müller & Frygell (2013) <i>UN: Stop the mining in Sweden</i>	27. SVT Nyheter (2013) ”Pinsamt för Sverige”	28. SVT Nyheter (2013) Fortsätter satsa på Rönnbäcken	29. SVT Nyheter (2013) Kommunalråd avvaktar UD-svar	30. SVT Nyheter (2013) Fler samebyar vill anmäla rasdiskriminering till FN
31. Müller (2014) Gruvföretaget: Ingen överraskning	32. SVT Nyheter (2014) Var femte gruvprospektering inom naturreservat	33. SVT Nyheter (2014) Regeringsbeslut om gruvdrift rättsprövas	34. SVT Nyheter (2014) Kritiken mot gruvplaner växer	35. Frygell & Lindahl (2014) Flera hotade arter i gruvområde
36. Müller (2014) Gruvföretag nära konkurs	37. Müller (2014) Gruvföretag har fått ny ägare	38. Müller & Frygell (2014) Gruvföretag mirakelräddat	39. Svensson (2014) Norrman sätter fart på Rönnbäcken	40. SVT Nyheter (2014) <i>Renägarna förlorade igen</i>
41. Müller (2015) Skatteverket granskar gruvbolag	42. Müller (2015) Krav på gruvbolaget – avveckla tillstånden	43. Sameradion & SVT Sápmi (2016) Fortsatt gruvdrift i Rönnbäcken upprör	44. Liljeström (2020) FN om Rönnbäcksgruvan: Gör om gör rätt	45. Everljung (2021) Batteribranschen skriker efter metaller – kritiserade gruvplaner i Rönnbäcken igång igen
46. Everljung (2021) Marie Persson Njajta kämpar mot gruvplanerna i Rönnbäcken: ”Vill inte ha grön kolonialism”	47. Bergman (2021) Gruvexperten om Rönnbäcken: ”Det finns flera tänkbara hinder för gruvprojektet”	48. Everljung (2022/2023) Sverige vill säkra egen brytning av kobolt – största fyndigheten i Rönnbäcken	49. Everljung (2022/2023) 60 sekunder: Alla turer kring gruvplanerna i Rönnbäcken	

Appendix II: Translated quotes (original)

Original quotes (in Swedish) are listed below in the order they appear in the analysis, divided by the same subsections used in the analysis.

Pro-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken

Extractive exceptionalism

1. “Det skulle ge många arbetstillfällen och skulle nog göra att byn kunde leva upp lite året om.” (Elfström 2013)
2. “I Tärnaby där vi befinner oss nu så, förra året så var det 486 stycken som bodde här, så vi är en liten ort. Så det skulle betyda jättemycket för oss att få hit arbetstillfällen.” (Konflikt 2021)
3. “– Givet att man klarar miljöfrågorna så är det ett viktigt projekt, men det är inte avgörande för kommunen. Vi har varit tydliga med att om man kan hantera miljöfrågor och intressekonflikter så är vår grundinställning positiv. Men vi vill inte ha en gruva till varje pris, säger Tomas Mörtsell (C).” (SVT Nyheter 2013c)
4. “-Det är klart att det blir en påverkan, men vi måste uppfylla alla miljökrav. Kan vi inte visa att vi kan driva det här säkert kommer vi inte att få miljötillstånd och då blir det inget projekt, säger Fredrik Bratt, vd på Nickel Mountain.” (Elfström 2013)
5. “Sammantagen är de miljömässiga kraven en väldigt allvarlig fråga för ett svenskt gruvbolag, och Nickel Mountain Group-koncernen tar följaktligen miljöfrågorna på mycket stort allvar.” (NMR 2014: 5)
6. “– Just nu pågår ingen fysik aktivitet i området. Vi håller på med en stor uppdaterad lönsamhetsanalys för att se på vilket sätt projektet ska etableras. Hur vi ska få det lönsamt, men [också] hur vi kan etablera det på ett miljömässigt och socioekonomiskt förståndigt sätt, säger Peter Hjorth, vd vid Bluelake Mineral AB.” (Everljung 2021a)
7. “-Det är klart att det känns ju inte bra att det är ett ingrepp alltså, säger Anders. Men jag måste väga över att det är jobb, man får en inkomst och jag måste lita på att det sköts på ett bra och säkert sätt.” (Elfström 2013)
8. “– Vi följer svensk lag och vi har fått de bearbetningskoncessioner som behövs. Med det sagt så är det lång väg kvar innan det blir aktuellt med gruvverksamhet, säger Fredric Bratt.” (SVT Nyheter 2013b)

9. “– Vi måste titta på den delen mer i detalj. Vi vet inte vad FN har för grunder för att komma med sina uttalanden, vilken kunskap de har om svensk lagstiftning och om vårt gruvprojekt samt vilka sakliga grunder de har.” (SVT Nyheter 2013b)
10. “Nej men det mest uppenbara är väl att vi... Alltså det har gått en del tid sen de första gången tog upp den här frågan. Nu kommer de tillbaka med lite mer tydliga rekommendationer till Sverige eller Sveriges regering att man bör se över det här beslutet och kanske vidta vissa åtgärder. Så det har jag läst och noterat. Sen så kan jag ju säga att vi som bolag delar väl inte alla slutsatser i dokumentet rakt upp och ner, utan vi anser ju att det finns en välfungerande svensk lagstiftning när det gäller då minerallag och miljölagstiftning som styr väldigt noga hur och om och när en gruva får etableras och på vilket sätt och att det är väldigt noga reglerat hela processen. Att man ska då göra avväganden för att balansera olika intressen. Och det är klart väldigt vanligt förekommande att gruvintressen eller mineralintressen står mot då... ofta då rennäringen... rennäringens intressen och att då grundförutsättningarna i svensk lagstiftning, att man ska se om det finns möjligheter till samexistens. Så det är den synen vi har.” (Poggats 2020)
11. “– Vi kommer att utreda hur gruvverksamheten kommer att utformas och vilka villkor som kommer att gälla till skydd för allmänna och enskilda intressen. Vi har haft dialog med Vapstens sameby och kommer att ha närmare samråd i samband med ansökan om miljö tillstånd.” (SVT Nyheter 2013b)
12. “– Det är viktigt för alla gruvprojekt att ha en bra dialog med det lokala samhället, invånare, näringslivet och inte minst rennäringen. Vi har inte satt igång med det ännu. Men ser studien lovande ut så kommer vi att reaktivera dialogen.” (Everljung 2021a)
13. “– Det ska bli intressant att se vad UD svarar. Utifrån de beslut jag har läst så har företaget redan nu krav på samråd för att man ska kunna hitta en lösning som ska passa alla, säger Tomas Mörtzell (C).” (SVT Nyheter 2013c)
14. “Vi menar att man kan etablera en gruva med... på ett förnuftigt sätt, där man bör kunna samexistera, att det inte är frågan om diskriminering utan tvärtom att vi skulle ta väldigt stor vikt och intresse vid hur man kan samexistera med rennäring och samer, självklart.” (Poggats 2020)
15. “– De har inte utvecklat närmare på vilket sätt de skulle ha blivit diskriminerade på grund av sitt etniska ursprung som samer, säger Olov Widgren.” (Heikki 2014)
16. “– Vi har svarat att det för närvarande inte pågår någon gruvdrift i det här området och det är just gruvdrift som de har uppmanat regeringen att fatta beslut om att den inte ska få fortsätta, säger Olov Widgren, ämnessakkunnig på utrikesdepartementet.” (Heikki 2014)
17. “– Det är viktigt att vara tydlig med att det inte pågår någon gruvbrytning i Rönnbäcken och att ansökningarna om miljö tillstånd ligger två år fram i tiden. Innan dess ska vi ha samråd med alla intressenter, säger Fredric Bratt, direktör på Nickel mountain resources.” (SVT Nyheter 2013a).

Green growth

18. “– Den gröna klimatomställningen där vi går mot eldrivna fordon skapar helt nya branscher, som batterisektorn. De har stora behov av till exempel nickel, säger Peter Hjorth, vd vid Bluelake Mineral AB.” (Everljung 2021a)
19. “– Rönnbäcken är den största fyndigheten och skulle ge mest kobolt. Om gruvföretagen ska vilja bryta så vill de ha fyndigheter som innehåller så mycket kobolt som möjligt per ton sten.” (Everljung 2023)
20. “– Den snabba utvecklingen medför bristande tillgång till råmaterial och ett strategiskt oberoende för EU blir allt viktigare utifrån det geopolitiska läget. Vi behöver därför se till att säkra tillgången på de hållbara råmaterial som behövs för batteritillverkningen inom EU, säger Anneli Wirtén, generaldirektör på SGU.” (Everljung 2023)
21. Peter Hjorth (PH): “Vi är den enda riktigt stora inom EU där vi inte är beroende av till exempel nickel från Ryssland. Och det är strategiskt viktiga insatsvaror för den gröna omställningen, så att det är klart att den är otroligt viktig, både för Sverige men [också] för hela EU.”
Reporter: “Det har utpekats också som den största eller mest intressanta koboltfyndigheten i Sverige. Vad säger du om det?”
PH: “Jo men det stämmer. Vi kan producera 23 000 ton nickel per år i den här fyndigheten, men vi kan också producera nästan 700 ton kobolt, så att det ska vi absolut ta tillvara på. Det är en jättemöjlighet.” (Everljung 2023)
22. “Ja men jag förstår dem också, alltså det är inte kul att förstöra ett landskap. Det kommer ju bli en åverkan på naturen, givetvis. Men det kanske är ett pris man måste betala för att ha det där... och göra bilbatterier eller ha våra iPhone och alla de andra mobiltelefoner, då kanske vi måste ha ett ansvar också... för den här brytningen.” (Konflikt 2021)

Environmental justice

23. “Vi ska inte behöva importera saker kanske från Afrika. Har vi den produkten här och kan göra det på ett mer, få tag på den på ett bättre och mer miljövänligt sätt så tycker jag att då ska man titta på den biten innan man börjar förkasta den.” (Konflikt 2021)
24. Hans-Peter Karlsson (HK): “Det är inte trovärdigt tror jag att vi säger nej till gruvor, alldeles oavsett var de ligger. Om vi vill kunna ställa om till elektrifiering.”
Reporter: “Men när du säger det här med trovärdighet, vad är det du menar då?”
HK: “Nej men jag menar att man kan inte å ena sidan åka elbil och å andra sidan säga nej till att ta upp de mineraler som behövs för att tillverka elbilar, det är liksom inte hållbart, det är inte moraliskt hanterbart. Så det här ‘not in my backyard’, så kan vi inte agera. Hellre att det sköts på ett bra sätt, både miljömässigt och arbetsmiljömässigt, än att det liksom, barnarbetare i Kongo

ska gräva upp kobolt för att vi ska kunna åka elbil. Det är inte okej.”(Konflikt 2021)

Anti-mining narratives in Rönnbäcken

Environmental justice

25. “Med tillhörande industriområden, slaggdammar, infrastruktur, dammspridning etc. skulle gruvområdet i princip göra Rönnbäckenlandet obrukbart som renbetesland, och därigenom beröva samebyn ett mer eller mindre oersättligt vår- och höstland. I tillägg skulle de traditionella flyttlederna mellan de olika årstidsbetena blockeras.” (Saami Council 2021a)
26. “Rönnbäcksprojektet är det storskaliga nickelgravsprojektet med tre dagbrott som planeras på traditionellt samiska åretruntmarker i övre delen av Umeälven, utanför Tärnaby. Detta trots att samer och många andra protesterat högljutt i flera års tid. Samer har på flera olika sätt försökt framföra de enorma konsekvenser som projektet medför och att det inte finns något fritt och informerat förhandssamtycke och att det kränker urfolksrättigheter. Projektet berör hela Umeälvens dalgång samt hundratals samer, varav majoriteten av alla samer som berörs saknar inflytande i processen.” (Naturskyddsföreningen 2015)
27. “Det här handlar i grund och botten om mänskliga rättigheter. Regeringen har missat hela grundgrågan [*sic*].” (Bergström & Jonsson 2013)
28. “– Jag hoppas och förväntar mig att FN kommer ta hänsyn till de mänskliga rättigheterna och urfolksrättigheter.” (Frygell & Lindahl 2014)
29. “Gårdagens beslut innebär ett tydligt ställningstagande från regeringen att de inte har för avsikt trots internationell kritik att säkerställa möjligheterna för en långsiktig, hållbar och traditionell renskötsel” (SVT Nyheter 2013g).
30. “Det är högst anmärkningsvärt att ett land som vill kalla sig en rättsstat fortsätter att ignorera FN:s krav på att Sverige ändrar sin minerallag så att det tydligt framgår att samebyar har rätt att säga ja eller nej till gruvor inom deras traditionella områden” (SVT Nyheter 2013f).
31. “Baserat den kritik kommittén riktade mot Sverige för bara någon vecka sedan, är vi övertygade om att Rasdiskrimineringskommittén kommer att fälla Sverige. När Sverige fälls i ett individuellt klagomål kan man inte gärna fortsätta att ignorera FN, om man inte vill förlora allt anseende internationellt. Sverige måste då rimligen revidera minerallagen så att den respekterar samebyaras rättigheter” (SVT Nyheter 2013f).
32. “Som indikerats och som utvecklas grundligt nedan var gruvkoncessionen inte ett resultat av vad som föregick i det enskilda förfarandet. Snarare var beslutsprocessens resultat i allt väsentligt ‘förutbestämt’ av den nationella lagstiftningens utformning. Tillståndet till ingreppet i samebyns traditionella

- land och renskötsel var m a o inte en produkt av *tillämpningen* av lagen, utan av *lagen som sådan*. [...] “Egendomsrätten, korrekt implementerad, torde m a o utesluta många av de resursexploateringar, andra industri- och infrastrukturprojekt etc. som idag pågår och planeras inom renskötselområdet.” (Saami Council 2021a)
33. “– Nickelmountains gruvor ligger i hjärtat av samebyn. Gruvsystemet klyver samebyn i två och ödelägger helt centrala betesmarker, säger Inger-Ann Omma, medlem i Vapsten sameby i ett pressmeddelande.” (SVT Nyheter 2013f)
 34. “– Om gruvan startas i Rönnskär kommer det att få kraftiga konsekvenser för hela samebyn, säger han.
Du menar att Vapstens sameby inte kan existera om gruvan blir verklighet?
– Ja. Det är ju uppenbart. Om man delar samebyn i två delar kommer man inte kunna bedriva renskötseln. Gruvan kommer att förstöra de enda betesområdena som samebyn har tillgång till under hösten och våren, fortsätter Åhrén.”(Bergström & Jonsson 2013)
 35. “[...] Det blir uppenbart att Sverige spelar ett högt spel när det gäller bristen av respekt för internationell urfolksrätt och visar på en av konsekvenserna med rådande mineralpolitik som hotar hela det samiska folkets existens på sikt.” skriver Marie Persson på sin facebook-sida.” (SVT Nyheter 2013a)
 36. “Det kommer att vara dödsstöten för oss inom Vapstens sameby som renägare och familjer och för vår framtid och våra barn. Det kommer inte vara någon framtid för dem om den här gruvan blir av.” (Elfström 2013)
 37. “-Jag vill inte utsätta mina barn för och mina kommande generationer för de långsiktiga hälsoriskerna, eller andras barn heller. Det är ju fruktansvärt. Det kommer ju inte finnas någon framtid kvar, vi kommer ju inte kunna leva av och med naturen som vi gör nu” (Elfström 2013)
 38. “Jag oroar mig för våra barns framtid. Nu dyker nya lycksökare upp medan vi bara försöker leva här. Det spelar ingen roll vem som driver projektet, vi kommer aldrig sluta kämpa för barnens och kommande generationers värdighet, mark, vatten, mat, hälsa, kultur, framtid och rättigheter” (Sameradion & SVT Sápmi 2016)
 39. “Så länge det finns tillstånd så finns det ett överskuggande hot att gruvan blir verklighet.” (SVT Nyheter 2013d)
 40. “Bearbetningskoncessionerna för Rönnbäck är giltiga fram till 2037, dvs i 22 år till. Att ha dessa tunga tillstånd hängande över sitt liv och sitt område till 2037 är inte värdigt eller hållbart då det hotar hela den samiska livsföringen i området så fundamentalt men även miljön och andra näringar.” (Naturskyddsföreningen 2015)
 41. “Det är värt att veta att de här koncessionerna som beviljas, de är väldigt tunga när de väl är, när de väl finns och de kan köpas och de kan säljas. Att folk ska leva med det här hängande över sig till 2037 det är ju liksom... Det är ganska överkligt, man kan ju inte liksom fundera på det för då blir man ju tokig.” (Konflikt 2021)
 42. “I våran [*sic*] föräldrageneration... dom lever ju ett liv före dämningen och ett liv efter. För det blev så stora förändringar i såväl landskap som ... livet och

- fisket och isarna och... Det var ju ett jättetrauma för... för många som lever... och väldigt många var ju tvungna att fara härifrån. Kunde ju inte bo kvar.” (Konflikt 2021)
43. “Och nu kommer då det här stora, eller har vi fått det här stora projektet som hänger över oss och jag trodde inte att det gick och göra mer ingrepp för man har redan varit och ställt till med så mycket” (Konflikt 2021)
 44. “-Rennäringen i dag anpassar sig oerhört mycket till de konkurrerande markanvändningar som påverkar vår livsföring redan i nuläget. Det går inte att anpassa sig längre än där vi befinner oss i dag” (Elfström 2013)
 45. “I tillägg är dock samebyn redan sedan tidigare hårt ansatt av ytterligare gruvetableringar och andra industriella etc. ingrepp. Dessa kumulativa effekter innebar att samebyn stod särskilt illa rustad att hantera ännu ett kraftigt ingrepp.” (Saami Council 2021a)
 46. “– Koloniseringen av lappmarken är inte en historisk företeelse, säger SSRs förbundsordförande Jörgen Jonsson. Den sker idag, när svenska regeringen går in och bereder gruvnäringen väg i Sápmi, och den sätter vår existens på spel. Den motiveras av kortsiktiga ekonomiska intressen, att utländska bolag ska få göra vinst på Sveriges mineraler. Detta kan vi inte godta, avslutar Jonsson i ett pressmeddelande.” (SVT Nyheter 2013g)
 47. “Det är ett kolonialt tänkande att de där gubbarna ska sitta och ha förtur till marken i 25 år. Det är inte deras mark men deras spekulationer tillåts gå före vårt [*sic*] liv och arv.” (Sameradion & SVT Sápmi 2016)
 48. “– Vi vill inte ha en grön kolonialism, varken här eller någon annanstans. Låter man metallpriserna styra så driver det på projekt här och på andra ställen i världen där det är rent olämpligt, säger hon.” (Everljung 2021b)
 49. “Nu kommer då omställningsargumenten och driver på fler exploateringar, inte bara gruvor utan det är också vindkraftsprojekt och annat, och det är batterifabriker och sånt. Då blir det plötsligt aktuellt igen. Så vi från samiskt håll har sagt också att vi vill inte ha en grön kolonialism, varken här eller någon annanstans. Är det någon som har förespråkat omställning så är det ju en mängd olika urfolksrörelser runt om i världen.” (Konflikt 2021)
 50. “Det är lite lustigt att den här bakgården alltid ska hamna i Sápmi.” (Konflikt 2021)
 51. “‘Vill du inte ha en telefon?’ eller ‘ja men samtidigt som vi startar den här gruvan då kommer vi att släppa ut barn ur gruvorna här’, alltså det är ganska ful argumentering, och det, jag tycker det är ganska smaklöst att föra fram den typen av argument och samtidigt är man så himla hemmablind att man inte ser... vad som händer i Sápmi, att det faktiskt finns ett urfolk här i Sverige också som är värt att värna. Och på nåt sätt så ser jag ju också att samiska barns möjligheter att leva kvar i sina områden... de skärs ju sönder, det är liksom finns ju ingenting kvar om man omöjliggör... för samer också att leva och föra sitt arv vidare.” (Konflikt 2021)

Human-nonhuman interdependency

52. “Många andra har även engagerat sig och lyft fram de stora naturvärden och hotade arter som finns i området. Dessa är skyddade enligt lag och exploateringen äventyrar även uppfyllandet av Sveriges miljömål, EU:s ramdirektiv för vatten samt Sveriges åtaganden i internationella miljökonventioner.” (Naturskyddsföreningen 2015)
53. “– Det blir en total ödeläggelse av de naturvärden som finns om gruvan blir av, säger Per Nihlén.” (Johansson 2013)
54. “– När jag stod på en av bergstopparna på Rönnbäcksnäset var jag omgiven av knotiga gamla tallar och utsikten ut över sjön och fjällen. Det var en helt absurd tanke att detta område om några år skulle vara täckt av dagbrott, högar av schaktmassor, och ett industriområde stort som Umeå stad, säger Lisa Behrenfeldt, Skydda Skogen i ett pressmeddelande.” (SVT Nyheter 2014a)
55. “‘Dagens mineralpolitik och mineralagstiftning håller inte och måste ändras. Miljöfrågan är fortfarande lämnad vind för våg tills allra sist i processen, en eventuell prövning i mark- och miljödomstolen.’ Skriver Marie Persson på sin facebook sida.” (SVT Nyheter 2013a)
56. “– Det är pinsamt för Sverige att FN måste gå in och lägga sig i ett gruvprojekt. Nu har man dessutom helt utelämnat miljödiskussionen eftersom den har lämnats till sist i prospekteringsprocessen. [...] – Det är katastrofalt. Miljöhänsyn kommer sist i processen och det innebär att även om miljöintrånget slutligen bedöms vara för stort kan riskkapitalbolagen härja fritt i flera år och hota miljön, andra jobb och slå in en kil mellan olika grupper på en ort.” (SVT Nyheter 2013e)
57. “Tillstånden gavs i en tid av överdriven tilltro till gruvbranschens framtid och förmåga till lokalt såväl som nationellt ekonomiskt uppsving. Nu vet vi att detta var en tillfällig bubbla och bolaget har själva konstaterat att det inte finns utsikter att få någon ekonomi i Rönnbäckprojektet. Enorma ekonomiska fiaskon (t.ex. Northlandkonkursen i Pajala) såväl som ekologiska och mänskliga katastrofer med gruvdamms haverier, nu senast i Brasilien där minst 28 personer dött, men även i Kanada och Finland, visar att riskerna är reella och kan få oöverskådliga konsekvenser.” (Naturskyddsföreningen 2015)
58. “Det är ju fruktansvärt. Det kommer ju inte finnas någon framtid kvar, vi kommer ju inte kunna leva av och med naturen som vi gör nu” (Elfström 2013)
59. “Markerna bär vår historia men också vår [sic] framtid. Bär alla berättelser, kunskap, för att vi ska kunna föra vidare vårt språk... Det gör vi ute i markerna. Så vi tillhör markerna och tar man då bort markerna då tar man ju bort oss.” (Konflikt 2021)
60. “Anledningen är att urfolks olikhet i grund och botten härrör från att deras kulturer, samhällen, sätt att leva – och till syvende och sist själva identiteter – är ofrånkomligen sammanflätade med deras historiskt brukade land. [...] Samebyn underströk att skada på dess historiska land och på dess kulturbaserade levebröd är skada på helt grundläggande element som dennas och medlemmarnas kultur, sätt att leva och identiteter; skador som helt uppenbart väger mycket tungt, också i egendomsrättslig mening.” (Saami Council 2021a)