Green colonialism in the Nordic context: Exploring Southern Saami representations of wind energy development

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Abstract
This paper explores social representations of wind energy development within reindeer herding lands among the Indigenous Southern Saami living within Norwegian borders. For this matter, the paper combines Social Representations Theory (SRT) with the analytical framework of "circuits of dispossession and privilege" and decolonial approaches within community psychology. Data consisted of seven individual semi-structured open-ended interviews, three collective interviews, and observation in three lawsuits, public meetings, protest actions, and reindeer herding activities. The findings suggest that for the subjects in this study, the onset of wind power represents the renewal of historical processes of dispossession through accumulation and colonialism, enabled by harmful knowledge gaps in Norwegian society and institutions, contrasting Southern Saami's values of responsibility and ecological practices. The implication of these findings suggests an urgent need of rethinking renewable energy and including indigenous knowledge in climate change agendas.

Keywords
circuits of dispossession, decolonial, green colonialism, renewable energy, social representations theory, Southern Saami
"For centuries, it was the land of the reindeer, not that of the strong and electrified man. A new and white man spread out his three wings, and dispossess centuries and future memories."

Sara Emilie Jåma, Reindeer herder and poet (in Fjellheim, 2016).

(This article author’s translation from original in Norwegian)

1 | INTRODUCTION

This article explores how large-scale wind power industrial sites are implemented in Norway and experienced by the Indigenous Southern Saami community. Although large-scale wind energy projects are framed as climate change mitigation strategies, they can simultaneously endanger sustainable life systems, violate human rights, or add an “insult to the injury” of communities already striving to adapt to climate change (Avila, 2018; Dunlap, 2019; Marino & Ribot, 2012). In such a context, some populations are not only vulnerable to climate change, as policies of climate change mitigation can also put their life systems at risk. Among the Indigenous Saami population, tensions concern the survival of their ancestral reindeer herding, which given its cultural centrality is protected by international law. Winters are becoming unstable, causing threats for both herders and animals (Riseth & Tømmervik, 2017). Large-scale wind power facilities can further reduce resilience in herding by dispossessing Saami herders of their pasturelands. In Norway, Aili Keskitalo, the Saami parliament’s president, has summarized this policy and development practice as “green colonialism” (The arctic circle, 2020), pinpointing that the processes around wind energy development might intensify colonial losses of land and rights in Norway.

In the current Anthropocene, or capitalocene era (see Adams (2020) for psychological perspectives on these concepts), generating more knowledge about how green discourses can renew colonial legacies is crucial. Examining wind energy development in the Southern Saami territory, I advance community psychology’s (CP) engagement with the experiences among individuals and communities exposed to large-scale renewable energy projects, affecting their human rights. Critical orientations in CP have long traditions of questioning power imbalances and working for social justice (Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2019; Montero, 2009). These and the more recent epistemological discussions in CP that have followed the decolonial turn (e.g., Dutta, 2018; Dutta, Sonn, & Lykes, 2016) could contribute with research on possible consequences of climate change mitigation or adaptation projects. From social psychology, the social representations theory (SRT) (Moscovici, 1984) has been applied to explore how and why resistance to renewable energy projects is becoming so common (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2017; Upham, Bögel, & Johansen, 2019). Their research has complexified how we understand resistance to change and helped to overcome previous assumptions such as NIMBY (not in my backyard). Yet, research has focused on research sites in the Global North, in which issues concerning minority or Indigenous rights are less evident. Furthermore, SRT researchers themselves identified that there is still a need for a more profound analysis of how power asymmetries and dissent operate in practice (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015). This should avoid reducing interpretations of findings to the social cognitive realm (Batel & Adams, 2016).

Proposing a combined framework of critical CP and SRT, this article seeks to accentuate the latter’s critique of power asymmetries in processes of energy transition. The article combines SRT with decolonial and critical CP to explore the lived experiences among the Southern Saami confronting with wind power development. I engage with the works of Michelle Fine and her colleagues (Fine & Ruglis, 2008; Fine, Greene, & Sanchez, 2016; Weis & Fine, 2012) to contribute to this forming literature, as their work building on their framework of “circuits of dispossession and privilege” provides fertile bridges between CP and broader frameworks of decolonization and

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1 The article uses the English spelling Saami for the people, and Saepmiea for the Saami peoples’ territory. While Saami is often also written as Sami or Sámi, and Saepmie can be written as Såpmi, I have chosen the spelling because it is close to the letters and pronunciation in the Southern Saami people’s languageåarjel-saemien gïele.
political ecology. Their optic of “circuits of dispossession and privilege” considers how global neoliberal politics shapes individuals’ and communities’ experiences and possibilities for self-determination (Fine & Ruglis, 2008), and is attentive to the relevance of positionality in knowledge production. This further provides a good dialogue with decolonial directions in psychology (Maldonado-Torres, 2017) and their attention to epistemological location (Sousa Santos, 2014).

Thus, Fine and colleagues offer analytical conceptualizations useful to interpret findings through SRT in this study. Their concepts, taken together and combined with SRT as a framework for analysis, underscore how marginalized individuals and communities might construct unique knowledge about oppressive structures, and how the more powerful in these same structures can develop ignorance about their own knowledge gaps and lack “epistemic humility” (Pilgrim, 2020; see also Sousa Santos, 2016). The application of these concepts in the forthcoming analysis illuminated how participants’ shared social memories and their engagements in dialogues with other communities provided tools and sources of critical knowledge that allowed participants to anchor, position, and challenge “green discourses” in the ongoing particular Saami–Norwegian colonial situation (Bastien, Kremer, Kuokkanen, & Vickers, 2003). Such critical knowledge is highly due in Norwegian political agendas, and this study underscores the relevance of current decolonizing discourses in the Norwegian context.

1.1 | Wind power in Norway

Related to its international climate change mitigation commitments, the Norwegian government is facilitating an expansion in large-scale wind power projects in multiple sites across the country. Even if this development progressed slower than in other European countries, related to the vast hydropower resources in the country (Inderberg, Rognstad, Saglie, & Gulbrandsen, 2019), currently, a shift from a history where policies aimed for state control and national sovereignty (Christiansen, 2002) toward a more volatile situation where transnational capital and global interests set the agenda has been observed. The field is currently moving quickly. Otte, Rønningen, and Moe (2018) found that the increase in wind energy development is inspired by Norwegian commitments to European electricity markets and domestic consumption. Likewise, this is intertwined with national and transnational companies related to aluminum smelting and energy-demanding servers, such as Norsk Hydro, Alcoa, Google, and Facebook (Bakke, 2019), purchasing renewable energy. Through renewable energy purchases, these industries can “green” their activities and gain market shares in the wake of the Paris Agreement (Gunderson, Stuart, & Petersen, 2018). Among the investors, we find a mix of public and private capital. Whereas relatively small companies tend to initiate the license applications for wind power projects, the rights are frequently sold to big, transnational investment funds (Hovland, 2020). The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE) is central to facilitating licensing processes. In 2019, NVE published a report mapping potential wind energy expansion sites, in addition to already granted licenses (Lee, 2019). The report was widely contested, and government withdrew it to redesign the process.

When wind power industries claim negligible social and environmental impacts, research from around the world suggests that significant socioecological impacts persist, which adversely affect the livelihoods of vulnerable communities (Dunlap, 2019; Gorayeb, Brannstrom, de Andrade Meireles, & de Sousa Mendes, 2018; Siamanta & Dunlap, 2019). This is also the case for Saami territories in Sweden (Lawrence, 2014). Thus, wind energy development has generated significant opposition (Devine-Wright, 2005; Dunlap, 2019; Gifford, 2008; Pasqualetti, 2011; Siamanta & Dunlap, 2019; Wolsink, 2006). Norway is no exception. Environmentalist organizations observe a rise in memberships due to wind power (Stranden, 2019), and new local and national protest networks are emerging. These movements build their discourses on combinations of environmental, health-related, political, and social arguments (Oil and Energy Department, 2020), which are slowly generating greater awareness amongst the Norwegian public.
1.2 Southern Saepmi and violations of indigenous rights

Several of the large-scale wind power projects in Norway are implemented within mountain regions where the Saami people have reindeer herding rights based on their historical land use of the areas. The Indigenous Saami, in fact, is an Indigenous people with great internal linguistic and cultural diversity who populate areas that today are under Swedish, Norwegian, Russian, and Finnish sovereignty. The Saami’s self-determination is, therefore, inhibited by these countries’ borders and state institutions. In each country, the Saami population struggles to advance certain rights, meanwhile highlighting the persistence and continuity of colonial relationships and legacies (Spangen, Salmi, Äikäs, & Lehtola, 2015). In the Norwegian Saami context, this is illustrated by the arrival of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2018 (Normann, 2019). In 2022, the TRC shall deliver a report on how fornsksningspolitikk (“norwegianisation politics”) has inflicted colonial injustice on the Indigenous Saami and the country’s Kven/Norwegian Finns minorities, and propose pathways for reconciliation. The Norwegian government has ratified the United Nations International Labor Organization’s (ILO) 169 in 1990 as well as enshrined Saami rights into the constitution. Yet, in many cases concerning diverging interests in land use, the advances of Saami self-determination have experienced setbacks (Broderstad, 2014).

The Southern Saami is one among the Saami populations. Whereas their traditional territory is extensive, the Southern Saami are a minority in the cities and settlements where they live. Norway has no ethnic register, but the Southern Saami cultural center, Samien Sijte, estimates a population of around 2000 people, distributed across Sweden and Norway. This includes approximately 500 native language speakers, with the Saami language, åarjel-saemien gïele, listed by UNESCO as in danger of extinction (Steinfjell, 2014). Reindeer herding is at the heart of the Southern Saami culture. Years of colonial and state assimilation practices have affected their community, leaving them with few remaining spaces to strengthen and transfer knowledge, language, and cultural practices, except those generated around herding (Normann, 2019).

In Southern Saepmie2, an enduring conflict concerns the nationally established “thesis” about when and how the Saami populated these areas. Yngvar Nielsen, the first Norwegian professor in ethnography, alleged in his dissertation in 1889 that the Southern Saami had only arrived in the province of Trøndelag in the 18th century (Fjellheim, 2020). This “authorized truth,” however, is contested by Saami researchers with archeological evidence that suggests Saami presence in the region as early as 800–1200 AD (Fjellheim, 2019). This authorized truth can be understood as one of the strong expressions of epistemological violence (Teo, 2011) that has produced material and symbolic consequences for the Southern Saami. Although historical negation is harmful in itself (Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Khan, 2008), the “thesis” supported claims about who came first in lawsuits over land rights between Norwegian farmers and Saami reindeer herders. Saami researchers continue to demand from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), in Trøndelag region, to rewrite the history books. As late as 2005, the publication of a three-volume history of the Trøndelag region continued to omit the Saami from the history of the region (Fjellheim, 2019).

Media discourses might also be having a negative effect on Saami reindeer herding. Rather than focusing on how climate change affects herding districts, the Norwegian government and the media appease the distorted belief that reindeer herding is an environmental “offender” (Benjaminsen, Reinert, Sjaastad, & Sara, 2015). The expressions of climate change on herding vary between regions, but the impacts are expected to worsen in the coming years (Riseth & Tømmervik, 2017). In 2017, for instance, in one of the districts under study in this article, Jillen-Njaarke sijte (see below), around 100 reindeers slipped on the snow-covered ice produced by an unstable winter and fell down a steep mountainside (Namdalsavis, 2017). The herder, clinging to a tree, barely saved his life. Hence, while reindeer herders are working to adapt to increasing climatic instability, in the last decade, Southern Saami lands have additionally turned into sites of contestations over wind energy development.

2Saepmie is the land of the Saami people, covering extensive parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola peninsula in Russia.
The Southern Saami claim that industrial-scale wind turbines will have a disastrous socioecological effect on herding. The turbines bring increased human activity, the construction of energy infrastructure, and new road networks that will negatively affect reindeers’ pasturelands, thus threatening Saami herding practices, livelihoods, and consequently their cultural survival. The Saami parliament’s current president, Ailo Keskiitalo, calls wind energy development “green colonialism” (The arctic circle, 2020), linking current trends of renewable energy development with historical processes of dispossession and subjugation inflicted on the Saami.

1.3 | Psychology and climate change

Since the American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Interface Between Psychology and Global Climate Change (2009), publications on “climate” and “psychology” have proliferated. In 2015, researchers clustered psychology’s main contributions into three main categories: public perceptions, behavioral drivers, and the relation between climate change and psychosocial well-being (Clayton et al., 2015). A risk is that individualizing tendencies in mainstream psychology are transferred to how we understand climate change and distract our attention from the structural political context where human behaviors are embedded (Batel & Adams, 2016). Furthermore, although concern for the consequences of climate change for the world’s vulnerable communities is emphasized (Swim et al., 2011), only recently this awareness centered also on how climate change politics can affect vulnerable communities (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2017).

SRT is suitable to study processes of change and has been applied to comprehend the dynamics of protest against renewable energy projects (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015). SRT originates in the works of Moscovici (1984) and was initially developed as an alternative to both Marxist determinism and scientific positivism (Moscovici & Marková, 1998), exploring how people create meanings in processes of change. SRT scholars focus on meaning constructions created in the interface between the individual and the collective that propel social action. Even when SRT has an awareness of power as one of its foundations, researchers have suggested that SRT has not escaped neoliberal influences in academia’s practice and conceptualizations (Gjorgjioska & Tomicic, 2019). This can result in social-cognitive reductionism (Batel & Adams, 2016), downplaying focus on power asymmetries when researching resistance to renewable energy (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015).

Critical CP focuses on uncovering and transforming power imbalances (e.g., Burton & Kagan, 2005; Montero, 2009), and thus provides a framework to correct this emergent social-cognitive reductionism associated with some uses of SRT (Batel & Adams, 2016). Contributing to this approach, below I combine SRT and critical CP to understand the effects of wind energy development in Saami territory. Whereas SRT has less frequently been applied within CP, its focus on the dynamics of meaning construction, and how these can open up (or shut down) processes of social change and resistance, structures the analysis. Further, the below outlined framework from critical CP and decolonial approaches was useful in interpreting the findings.

Critical community psychologist Michelle Fine (2014) and her colleagues provide a useful conceptual basis foundation. Fine’s work develops an interdisciplinary and critical CP through three relevant analytical concepts. First, the concept of “circuits of dispossession and privilege” (Fine & Ruglis, 2008) captures how neoliberal politics throws people into circuits that dispossess them of possibilities to achieve self-determination. Their work thus connects CP to such as political ecological research that has centered on David Harvey’s (2004) now classical work on accumulation by dispossession. Second, Weis and Fine (2012) urge psychologists to adopt a “critical bifocality.” This implies redirecting our gaze from asking “what’s wrong with these victims?” toward asking “what’s wrong with their environments?” Critical bifocality analyzes how politico-economic structures and histories across scale, place, and sectors move under the skin of people, affect psychological well-being, and widen or constrict possibilities for individuals and communities (Weis & Fine, 2012). Adopting this perspective is central for resolving problems of social determination and victim blaming in psychology, as it holistically approaches social structure and individual/collective agency (Fine, 2014). By considering how politics affect people, we also gain knowledge about the nature
of political cultures and processes enacted. Third, the related concept of “prec(ar)ious knowledge” (Fine et al., 2016) offers a bridge between these critical–psychological theories, developed in the peripheries of the Global North, with decolonial critiques of development from authors such as Arturo Escobar (2018), Walter Mignolo (2007), and Sousa Santos (2014). They all demonstrated the importance of different epistemologies of location and the pluriverse of knowledge (Escobar, 2018). These broad theoretical schools view the world and modernity as shaped by coloniality, the outcome of how imperialism and colonialism have formed the world. Our epistemological position within the colonial structures (or within circuits of dispossession, as Fine would say) generates the locations from which we can observe the world and produce knowledge. In effect, these scholars deconstruct the geographical south/north binary, demonstrating how the colonial system subjugates different knowledges and epistemologies to the functioning of racist social and economic orders. In the above mentioned word game of Fine et al. (2016), a “precarious position” enables “precious knowledge” and social critique. Although Fine’s framework was developed within urban peripheries in the United States, researchers adhering to the decolonial project have adopted these concepts to theorize narratives around settler colonial dispossession (Quayle, Sonn, & van den Eynde, 2016). Thus, below, I adopt a framework that combines SRT with critical CP and decolonizing epistemological perspectives that highlight the issue of positionality within such circuits of dispossession in knowledge construction. Conversations between critical CP and decolonial approaches can generate insightful knowledge concerning climate change mitigation policies and how they might actually accelerate ecological crisis and coloniality as opposed to correcting them.

2 | METHODOLOGY

To explore individually and collectively constructed meanings among Southern Saami individuals about complex processes of change, this article builds on semi-structured interviews (N = 7) and three collective interviews (total N = 24). This also included observing three legal procedures, four TRC preparation meetings, multiple protest mobilizations, and accompanying Saami herders in some of their activities. On all occasions, my presence as a researcher was transparent. I established contacts with people at meetings, on social media, or through common friends or acquaintances. I sought to interview people who identified as Southern Saami, who belonged to different herding districts (sijte), and were from different age groups and genders. I also sought to interview people possessing different knowledges, related to their relations to or position within the sijte.

All the research participants are engaged in struggles against wind energy development in herding lands in some way, either as reindeer herders, as professionals, or as activists and members of the Southern Saami community. Herding was a part of everyone’s life at some point. All participants have some kind of relation to the projects presented in Table 1. To maintain anonymity, extracts from the data set are presented without reference to the wind power projects. The Southern Saami community is relatively small, and research participants could easily be identified. There is an ongoing conflict and power imbalances at play, which stress the importance of making research participants anonymous. There are, however, no clear boundaries between expert knowledge and lay knowledge. I should acknowledge that this study benefits from the insights of the research participants who have been anonymized. Although this dilemma remains unsolved in the present study, I want to call attention to this tension in research ethics, particularly so in studies situated in colonial contexts where research has led to much harm and Indigenous knowledges have been ignored, as in the Southern Saami community (Table 2).

2.1 | Participant–researcher relationship

The research took place in a colonial context, where “research” does not always have a positive connotation (e.g., Fjellheim, 2020), because it can risk reproducing epistemological violence (Teo, 2011) against the Saami
| Project title                                           | District                          | Number of turbines | Companies involved                                                                 | Status, July 2020                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Fosen Vind DA (Complex of six separate units)          | Fovsen-Njaarke                    | 277                | Fosen Vind DA, Joint Venture by Statkraft, Trønder Energi and Nordic Wind Power DA | Almost constructed, though still in the legal system  |
| Stokkfjellet vindpark                                   | Gåebrien Sijte, Saantin Sijte     | 21                 | Trønder Energi                                                                     | Construction started                                  |
| Kalvatnan                                               | Voengehl-Njaarke Sijte, Åarjel-Njaarke Sijte | 72                 | Fred Olsen Renewables                                                                | License retracted in 2016 after complaints to the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy |
| Øyfjellet Vindpark /Øyfjellet Wind AS                   | Jillen-Njaarke Sijte              | 72                 | Eolus Vind, Aquila Capital                                                           | Construction started. Lawsuit announced               |
communities. Researchers have, therefore, taken the initiative to develop new ethical guidelines (Stordahl, Tørrres, Møllersen, & Eira-Åhren, 2015), but these have not yet been turned into a policy. As I am a woman external to the Saami community, several steps were sought to construct an ethical research process. I pursued a dialogical approach, both during interviews (Poopuu, 2020) and in the overall process. Demonstrating transparency, respect, and contributing with perspectives into the conversation when I found it constructive, both during and after interviews, intended to create a space of knowledge co-creation. I was outspoken about my views derived from years of working in solidarity movements around indigenous and small-farmer communities in Latin America. My parallel engagement in a different action research project in the Saami context further increased transparency (Normann, 2019). This openness disposition shaped the conversations and helped build relations of trust. Some people who expressed support for this study project, and with whom I have shared perspectives in manifold informal conversations, either declined invitation to participate in an interview or I decided not to ask, explained by the sometimes tremendous burden experienced by them to defend their rights. There has been an increasing interest in the wind energy conflicts among researchers, and especially master students and journalists, and I can sense exhaustion from research participants when it comes to offering accounts of their lived tragedy and struggle, perhaps without seeing that researchers have contributed to their case. To avoid becoming yet another burden to a large number of individuals, I decided to combine different types of data sources. Participating in meetings and public events allowed me to mutually be supportive and construct relations, and reflect on how social representations are produced, contested, and denied in context (Jovchelovitch, 2019).

2.2 | The interviews

Interviews were conducted with the use of a semi-structured open-ended guide. Each participant was interviewed once and the sessions lasted from 60 to 90 min. All individual interviews were recorded and transcribed. One group interview (N = 3) was recorded, whereas I took notes for the other two. Four of the interviews were carried out together with another researcher. During interviews, I encouraged free narratives to take place, thereby adding follow-up questions, to cover research questions and to explore additional aspects drawing my attention to the interviewee's narratives. All the interviews were carried out in the Norwegian language (my mother tongue), a language that the Southern Saami people speak with no more difficulty than do other citizens in Norway. However,
some of the deeper meanings, for example, related to herding, might fail to be captured in translation from åarjel-saemien giële.

2.3 | The analysis

I follow guidelines from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), searching for manifest and latent meanings, noticing particularly how silences during qualitative research might be culturally sensitive sources of knowledge, particularly in studying traumatizing experiences (Richardson & Allison, 2019). Thematic analysis is flexible and applicable to different kinds of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given this study’s methodological pluralism (Jovchelovitch, 2019), I find its flexible approach well suited. I read the transcripts of the interviews several times and grouped themes, also searching for associations between themes, while relistening to the audios when possible, and reading my notes to search also for latent meanings. I also read the detailed memos from the observations of trials and the other events, and then read these together with the interviews to strengthen the analysis of how the meaning making is shaped in these contexts.

3 | RESULTS

The thematic analysis allowed organizing three main social representations of wind power development inside reindeer herding lands, which will be described below.

3.1 | Wind power as “one more” in the Lounge Durée of dispossession

All participants reflected on wind power as yet another project in a long history of dispossession. Accumulated burdens caused by infrastructural and extractive projects along with failed politics have dispossessed the Saami of land and autonomy. This was often called piece-by-piece politics, and their accumulation was considered to threaten Southern Saami existence. There was a wide frustration about how governmental instances such as NVE fail to consider the total number of projects affecting the reindeer herding. Sara explains:

There are always new challenges. Particularly related to the lands; challenges that we feel all the time. There is pressure from all sides. Construction of new cottages, hydropower. Power lines and cell phone towers, internet, constructions, roads, spear time houses. Expansion of, yes, construction everywhere. So we have become pressured more and more, and we have seen a reduction in the areas.

Anne pointed to contradictions between, on the one hand, strengthened legal frameworks guaranteeing Indigenous rights and, on the other, a high number of interventions that the herders must consider and eventually contest. She emphasized how the huge amount of projects makes it impossible for the reindeer herders to be herders, as herding requires people to be in the mountains and not in an office answering to all the emails requiring quick replies. Lars agreed: “We have a line of challenges, actually giving me ulcerous. (...) All things take a piece, and thus takes parts of the night’s sleep. Wind power is probably one of those.”

Narratives of continuity are also expressed in how Baajh vaeride årrodh—“let the mountains live” became the wording in protest actions. Forty years earlier, during a hard struggle to defend the rivers against the Alta–Kautokeino hydroelectric power station (Broderstad, 2014), “let the river live” was the catchphrase. Alta became a turning point in Norway, and the case is widely memorized within the Saami community. Remembering
Alta became a collective anchoring process, wind power development is placed as one more element in the continuing colonial situation.

Dialoguing with other indigenous people concerning their experiences added to this narrative of continuity, inserting their struggle into a broader Indigenous context and reflecting on the particularities of wind power. Anders explains:

I saw that the Apache indigenous, they have a way of viewing life. They experienced rough things, several of theirs were massacred...(...) and their consolation was that the mountains will last forever. Only the mountains will be there for the next generations. I found that incredibly beautiful, but at the same time, it scares me that today when I see the wind power industry and all their plans, here not even the mountains will remain forever.

Other younger participants understood the loss of lands as expressions of “racism” (Per) or elements of “cultural genocide.” (Kristine) Kristine remembers her speech in a protest: "More of us were behind that speech, we all meant the same. Without herding, 'Who are we then?' We will disappear. And that is exactly what it is about, that thought of genocide." Their protest made its way to media, and in their case, the license was canceled.

In 2022, the TRC will deliver a report that documents the Norwegian colonial legacy in Saami territories. During the preparatory meetings of the TRC, several participants said it should not only document past injustices but also include the current land conflicts and the consequences of energy development on herding practices. During negotiations concerning the composition and mandate of the TRC between the Saami Parliament and the Norwegian Parliament, the Saami parliament did not get through with the proposed representative from Southern Saepmie. Later, the TRC secretary was positioned at the Arctic University of Norway, far north from Southern Saepmie. This provoked a weaker representation of the TRC within its Southern Saami community, where people often expressed being a "minority within the minority." Anne compared the weak inclusion of Southern Saami representation to the TRC in New Zealand, where the Maori had demanded a more fundamental inclusion in all phases. She contrasted the unwillingness to respect the Saami self-determination with Norwegian engagements outside the country’s borders:

Why is it so difficult to fix your own house, when you manage to travel out to the world? I have asked myself that question. We will not have reconciliation if they will only study how one lost the language in boarding schools. That was peanuts in comparison to everything else.

3.2 | Ignorance, as individual knowledge gaps or as structurally produced

Lack of knowledge among the general population, politicians, and scientists was considered to affect the processes in manifold ways. One such way was the ignorance about the Southern Saami’s existence within certain municipalities. Sara remembers high school:

There was very little knowledge, and they did not believe that the Saami live so far south, and less so that there is reindeer herding. So I see, that many people have not understood that there is reindeer herding here. And, if you don’t know that, you won’t take a position either (...) I have heard several say, “Oh my God, I did not believe there was reindeer herding here.” And then, when you read about the case, we are not even mentioned. That is disappointing to me. Disappointing, and I think it is strange that it is even allowed to invisiblize in this way. But the media is powerful, it has great power.
Sara’s view on lack of knowledge in her county, Trøndelag, is supported by the referred research (Fjellheim, 2020) on how leading universities historically have committed epistemological violence (Teo, 2011). Knowledge disputes were also central during lawsuits. During the three lawsuits I observed, weaknesses in the environmental impact assessments preceding NVE’s licensing of wind power parks were discussed. Both parties’ lawyers cross-examined the researchers who had been selected by the wind power companies to do the environmental impact assessments. During coffee breaks, some conversations had to do with how Saami researchers’ and herders’ knowledge virtually becomes disqualified in these fundamental processes. Some Saami expressed their perception that this is due to misrepresentations of Saami people within Norwegian institutions, where Saami knowledge might be taken as biased, putting empathy with other Saami over what comes to be considered as “value-free knowledge” and defending a “hidden agenda” favoring reindeer herding. Conversely, their perception was that the consultants, who are picked out by the companies, were not necessarily preconceived as biased by actors in the Norwegian bureaucracy, even when, as it appeared during the trials, a frequently used consulting company was partially financed by one of the state companies with interests in the construction of a wind park.

The decisive consultation procedures, guaranteed by legal and normative frameworks on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and facilitated by NVE, were also considered to be too limited in time, sometimes reduced to a workday only. Anders reflected, “How can we explain to them in such a short time, what we have learned through generations of experience?” He had asked the NVE bureaucrats in a meeting if they had previous knowledge about reindeer herding, and their answer had been negative. Another leader of a herding district, during a public meeting, had put forward the strain with which he experienced the dialogues with NVE: “I was taken as a hostage in dialogues sessions with lunches.”

Knowledge hierarchies or the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007) is a pressing topic in discourses on decolonization, expanding also in Norway (Normann, 2019). The perceived dismissal of the Saami’s unique and profound knowledge about reindeer, transferred through generations, was a sore and central issue put forward in all the interviews, which mirrors the global climate change debate, where Indigenous knowledges are ignored too often (Leff, 2015).

In the courtroom, I observed translation issues. First, while proceedings centered on issues of economic efficiency in herding, a proper language to describe the deep, and even spiritual, connection that many Saami maintain with animals and mountains was absent. Saami concerns were confined to technical and economic considerations. Second, there are more cultural-specific ways of being and speaking. On occasion, I sensed that judges and lawyers might have misunderstood key aspects in witnesses’ accounts, considering how they speak about herding. Saami witnesses seemed to be taking for granted certain fundamental knowledge about the reindeer’s movement, so things were left unsaid, and perhaps not fully understood by the judges.

3.3 Individual and collective responsibility to guarantee herding in the future

Strong feelings of responsibility were defined for the participants’ identity. There is literally “no choice” but to continue defending the herding, as individuals, as members of a particular sijte, and as a broader Saami, and even global Indigenous community. Per explains:

Historically, we are a people that has had to struggle to exist. This is perhaps an extension of that; we see that if we do nothing, we disappear. Because many also neglect their Saami identity, they select it away. Many are worried about that, and the ones who are proud of their identity, are very concerned that it must continue existing and flourishing.
Waking in the footsteps of older relatives gave senses of pride, safety, and belonging:

I often imagine the reindeers as my big family. And without that family one is nothing. Yes, of course, *idtjie* and *aehljie* are my parents. But I feel that the mountain is a big part of me, it is a big part of my social life. In a way, it is a part of me, and if it is taken away, who is one then, and what will happen. Maybe I could have found an A4 life, and lived an office life, but it would not have been me, it would not have been real life. You know when you invite someone home, you rather take them up to the mountains, and you tell them “here and there, behind there”...It is so much bigger, those are paths with history, you see (Berit).

As keepers of an ecological tradition, which enables close ties with mountains and animals, narratives of freedom and love for the animals were strong. The thought of failure in defending the mountains for future generations equally provokes sadness. Sara coined what she feels as “future anxiety,” and continues:

On the one hand, you have to stand up against wind power, on the other, predators, and everything. “You have to follow up everywhere.” That you can never be in peace at any time and do what you are supposed to be doing. That we spend so many hours in meetings and such stuff when we are supposed to be outside. So, it is a hassle. But the youth, they know what's it all about, they understand. They have such power. So it is stressful to follow up all the time, but the reason one continues is that it means so much. We cannot let it go.

In the city of Mosjøen, Øyfjellet wind AS would provide renewable energy to the city's aluminum-producing fabric, owned by the transnational Alcoa, a company that requires renewable energy contracts to sell the final products as a green product (Fjellheim, 2020). Offering paid work to many of the city's inhabitants, there was what some environmentalists I met during data collection called “a silent and latent protest” in the city, as many people also depended on Alcoa. This placed an even greater responsibility on the Saami's shoulders: “More and more people say they are against it. But the reindeer herding is pictured as what might stop the onset of wind power here. So we feel alone in this” (Anders).

Responsibility for other districts was also strong. Several people revealed how the infliction of wind power in other herding districts would be so painful also for themselves that there would be no real celebration, even when they had won a case:

Many feelings there. It was a shame, because the same day that they acknowledged the license to a company elsewhere, they said no in our case. So then, we should be happy, while other reindeer herding Saami people were receiving the sad message that it would come to them? (...) So it feels like a common sorrow that all reindeer herding Saami share, we can never be happy over such a victory, there will always be happening some kind of intervention in other places. Always... (Kristine).

Responsibility connected the Saami experience to that of other distant people. One Southern Saami woman witnessing during a lawsuit pointed during her testimony to how the enclosure and loss of land in the wake of the construction of a wind energy industrial site in Sweden had forced her district to implement soybean-based food during winter. In her view, this was highly problematic: “It is extremely harming to know that the compound feed we are now using, is made out of Brazilian soybeans, contributing to the genocides of other indigenous peoples.”

She testified again in the appeal court 18 months later. She made the same point, adding that now her district had invented a food mixture to prevent contributing to deforestation and not extending their own lived tragedy to other people.

Many people underscored the contrasting irresponsibility in a climate change mitigation, which injures a reindeer herding that has lasted for centuries and that produces food with low ecological footprints.
Peder disclosed this by calling the wind company representatives “cowboys” and compared them to a Norwegian TV series Exit (2019) that portrays the daily life of quite ruthless and misogynist business elite in Oslo. Per pointed to an old saying, representing a “pact” between humans and reindeers that the whole animal must be used, and nothing should be thrown away. Sara posed a question to how the ecology in herding is ignored in public discourses:

We have tried to mention it, but perhaps it has not gained enough space. People are very interested in what concerns ecological food. That it should be environmental and sustainable. So reindeer meat should have gained more attention, yes. A bigger homage, actually, for the way it is done. Because it is very environmentally good.

She continues:

Because, what is “green”? One could ask oneself that, right. Wind power, I favor it. It should be a good energy form. But who must pay the price? Because someone always pays the price. No matter what happens, one will have a bad outcome. And in our case, I believe there are some imbalances if I can call it so. It is difficult to put words on this, but I believe they are only able to see numbers.

4 | DISCUSSION

I have forwarded three main themes to reflect Southern Saami representations of wind power developments. Representations were created through anchoring the unfamiliar into what is known through a common collective memory or through innovative objectification (Marková, 2012), such as in the case of Peder, who was picturing the actors in the wind power industry as the cynical, but also miserable, figures of the Exit. Identification with, and through, other Indigenous people’s struggles likewise served to embed the lived tragedy and distress into “what it means to be Saami, and Indigenous” and mobilize resistance both individually and collectively. These broader intersubjective processes enabled participants to contest whether green discourses are truly sustainable and to continue defending the legitimacy, and even global importance of herding as an ecological and responsible practice.

Salient was the representation of wind power as continuing dispossession, threatening the Saami existence of herding, or, in the words of the younger participants, even as racism or cultural genocide. During interviews, when such strong expressions were used, I sensed that we were entering emotionally loaded terrains: either it was said very silently or it followed after pauses. The Saami appear to be cautious in using strong words to describe the current conflicts. This might be related to hesitance in polarizing relations to the Norwegian state and society, or even acknowledging the relative well-being in comparison with other Indigenous peoples living under circumstances of direct violence. However, Anders pointed to that even if it is better to be colonized by “a pen” than by “a gun,” silencing and invisibilization can indeed be detrimental. The “stronger” communicative strategies among some of the younger participants can be related to how they participate in internationalized dialogues, through arts, gatherings, and social media, where other Indigenous peoples’ experiences come to mirror their own. However, it might also reflect the increased burden on their pasturelands, generating insecurity about the future to a bigger extent than has been the case for their parents’ generation. The relevance that the figure of “cultural genocide” can have to describe consequences of land disposessions to large-scale extraction industries for Indigenous Peoples is eloquently described elsewhere (i.e., Bachman, 2019; Short, 2010; Dunlap, 2020) and is beyond the scope of this study, but these narratives among young Saami should not be dismissed as a “simple” discourse by Norwegian politicians. For instance, the inclusion of åarjel-saemien gïele in the UNESCO list of threatened languages should generate alarm within Norwegian political institutions. Furthermore, it should be alarming that in Southern Saapm, very few people have resisted as full-time herders. In this vein, I identify a tension between the TRC aiming to undo the harm and the ongoing disputes over wind power. Such a tension resonates with international scholarship, pointing to the challenges such commissions encounter in working for truth and reconciliation while structural violence and land conflicts persist (James, 2018; Nesiash, 2016).
The theoretical framework applied in this study, where social representations are interpreted through the optics of decolonial theories that forward the relevance of epistemological location, and critical CP's focus on how our positions within circuits of dispossession allow us (or not) to construct critical knowledge support us to move beyond the cognitive reductionism risk identified by Batel and Adams (2016). I argue that the Southern Saami representations should be taken as sources of critical knowledge, which have not been considered properly by Norwegian institutions yet. This underscores the importance of decolonization discourse in Norway. Decolonization of academia became an issue in 2018 (see Normann, 2019), and it is in its place to suggest that the epistemological underpinnings of such discourse could, if worked into the country’s higher education, generate a stronger culture of critical reflexivity and epistemic humility (Pilgrim, 2020; see also Sousa Santos, 2016) within Norwegian institutions. Following the findings in this study, such “humility” and “good faith” are what the Southern Saami participants perceive as missing in the practices inside Norwegian institutions. Uncritical, epistemic fallacies might be detrimental for the Saami in these cases, if researchers behind the environmental impact assessments and the bureaucrats who interpret their findings are unaware of the shortcomings in the “maps” with which they guide themselves, and the Saami knowledge remains discarded as common sense, mere opinions (Sousa Santos, 2016) or even as activism. Such epistemic fallacies might then hinder that the different knowledge systems at play speak to each other. In this way, procedures following licensing processes in wind energy development, created to guarantee that Norway’s commitments to Indigenous rights are followed, can fail. Thus, the injury from research (Fjellheim, 2020) can continue to produce harm.

Indigenous peoples have denounced how climate change mitigation through quick fixes and large-scale interventions not only dispossession them of lands and life systems but also limits how we comprehend the current ecological crises. The subjects in this study observed a kind of “dissonance” between what is being projected through public messages about “saving humanity” in climate change mitigation and what actually happens to them in practice. This critique, which is in line with Fine et al. (2016) concept of “prec(ar)ious knowledge,” seems broadly ignored within Norwegian institutions, despite recent United Nations reports (IPBES, 2019; IPCC, 2019) documenting land use as a major cause of environmental destruction, calling for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in policies of climate change mitigation. Greater awareness of decolonial epistemologies, also within Norwegian institutions, could enable that the herders’ unique knowledge may be included, instead of lost, in the making of political agendas.

On the level of methodology, within decolonial and dialogical perspectives, there is an emphasis on constructing long-term collaborations rather than "entrepreneurial relationships," providing a “return” as in a capitalistic investment (May 2012; in Murrey, 2019). Here, knowledge construction can be one element. In this study process, I have maintained contact with several participants, disseminating relevant research when I can, and particularly bringing perspectives from the Latin American context into our conversations, instead of adopting a value-free position that this study’s findings identify as questionable.

There is a fine line between exposing the seriousness of this “Saami suffering”—which should be acknowledged—and promoting a victimization narrative. Through the concept of “Critical bifocality,” I have sought to redirect this gaze, and emphasized that the stress inflicted on the Saami conveys more about Norwegian politics than about themselves. In the ongoing decolonizing project within psychology, one of the strategies is to question how theory and practice in mainstream psychology might promote the interests of power (Adams, Kurtiș, Ordóñez, Molina, & Oropeza, 2018). Biased research on renewable energy risk makes NIMBY assumptions permeate within Norwegian bureaucracy, creating a kind of blindness toward the content of protests. The failure to uncover the manner in which colonial attitudes affect intercultural relations (Adams, Estrada-Villalta, & Ordóñez, 2018) and institutional practices in the Saami–Norwegian context creates institutional neglect and societal ignorance regarding Saami issues. In decolonial literature, it is established that majority populations can develop shortcomings in awareness about how colonialism influences knowledge production (Mignolo, 2007). Coloniality in Saempie was manifested through the ways in which the Southern Saami well-being and rights were downplayed in green discourses. Decolonizing psychology in Norway means recognizing these issues.
5 | CONCLUSION

This article explored Southern Saami social representations of wind power within reindeer pasturelands. SRT was useful for the analysis, in combination with critical CP and decolonial epistemologies. Power asymmetries entangled in these complex processes of energetic transition can make some social representations more widely defunded and supported (see Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015). Future research could disclose how Norwegian media cover the ongoing disputes and how representations of the Saami and reindeer herding are created and perhaps sustained within public institutions. Parallel to a lawsuit that I observed in December 2019, in which the Saami had taken a wind power company to court, claiming that the wind power project is so detrimental to the herding, and therefore to their cultural survival, that it violates international law, the COP25 occurred in Madrid. At COP25, the Indigenous delegation demanded a stronger human rights framework, ensuring that mitigation is implemented without harm to Indigenous communities (Abdellatif, 2020). Back in the Norwegian courtroom, references to these international developments were absent. Rather, lawyers representing the state-owned company Statkraft, the main owner in the Fosen Vind DA project, did what they are hired to do, breeding uncertainties about whether or not the wind turbines will deter herding, and thus downscaling the value of Saami knowledge. This “dissociation” between highly politicized international debates and the technical and alienating framing in a courtroom with little audience was striking. An inclusion of caution in developing mitigation politics to avoid inflicting a double burden on vulnerable communities is only the first step. Stronger inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and values is a prerequisite for a responsible environmental agenda. Critical CP and its decolonial directions can play an even more systematic role in engaging with the overarching issue of climate change and socioecological catastrophe.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data will be stored in the Norwegian Center for Research Data.

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