

# CONSTRUCTING DIALOGUES AND SOLIDARITY THROUGH “RADIO-CINEMA” IN THE SAMI-NORWEGIAN COLONIAL CONTEXT

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*The paper explores an ongoing radio-cinema project in the borderlands between journalism and action research, conducted in the context of colonial conflicts between the indigenous Sami people and the Norwegian state. Interpreting the empirical findings through decolonial and feminist optics, I posit that this radio-cinema project can be seen as a contribution to rethinking methodological creativity in Community Psychology. Through multidirectional dialogues and togetherness, it has mobilized individuals and communities for knowledge construction, creating possibilities for moving from “otherness” towards mutual recognition and affective solidarity.*

**Keywords:** community psychology, decolonial feminism, action research

## 1. Introduction

*For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world.*  
(Lorde, 1984/2012)

Norway sees itself as a nation-state built on the territories of two nations, the Norwegian and the indigenous Sami. However, across Fennoscandia, the Sami population continues to suffer the consequences of colonialism and dispossession of land rights (Lawrence, 2014), weakening proper institutions and cultural practices. Three contemporary processes show how colonial legacies shape intercultural relations between the Sami and the majority population. First, the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Injustices against Sami, Kven and Norwegian-Finnish peoples (TRC) in 2018, following negotiations between the Sami parliament and the Norwegian parliament, implied public recognition of the injustices of Norwegian state against the Sami. The TRC will mainly investigate occurrences before and during the period known as *Norwegianization*, when assimilation politics peaked. Starting in 1850, this period lasted to 1960 (Hansen & Sørli, 2012) or even 1980 (Minde, 2003).

The Norwegianization period has ended, but today’s global, neoliberal agendas threaten Sami livelihoods. The second process exemplifies this fact; the intensified conflicts around windpower development on Sami reindeer herding lands, dubbed *green colonialism* (Aslaksen & Porsanger,

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2017), as it brings Sami rights to cultural survival in collision with Norwegian commitments to mitigate climate change. Third, in 2018, Norway became the setting of an intense debate about the “*decolonization of the Academy*”. Discussions from other contexts (e.g. USA, South Africa) affected by colonial legacies nurtured the debate, but there were also efforts to root the discourse in Norwegian realities, including a critical assessment of the colonial entanglements within academia that have led to damaging consequences for the Sami (Lilleslåtten, 2018).

In dialogue with these broader processes, four women (including this author) from diverse professional backgrounds, but all with several years of solidarity work with Latin American grassroots movements, established a still-ongoing hybrid project in the boundaries between journalism and action research. One of us is Sami; the other three are non-Sami. We began with a three weeks long journey through the Sami territories – *Sápmi* – today under the sovereignty of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. 23 Sami women who have contributed in important ways in defending Sami rights, received us. Their voices became the sentiment of four episodes of a radio documentary, “In Elsa Laula’s Footsteps through Sápmi: 100 years of Sami struggle for rights”. Gradually, this work moved from being a “classic” journalistic project, intended for FM broadcasting, into a project of collective listening and multiple dialogues, with the episodes re-broadcast as “radio-cinema” and discussed in schools, festivals, museums, cinemas, conferences, seminars, workshops, by the fireside, in a prison, even in a cave.

Can experiences from our radio-cinema project, characterized by improvisation and “learning by doing”, contribute to refining the dialogue about more creative (Glăveanu & Sierra, 2015) action-research methodologies in Community Psychology (CP)? Is there room in current academic thinking and writing for conceptualizing, conducting and presenting such a project? “...if the social sciences disciplines (...) are themselves subject to regimes of knowledge which serve “whiteness” (...) then it becomes important to investigate different modes of writing, different modes of self-reflection than those regularized by the disciplinary social science history that we so often find ourselves subject to. This, clearly, is not to forego traditional social psychological investigation, or social scientific scholarship more generally. It is though to point to the limits of our ideological imagination within such domains, and to ask ourselves what can be imagined and said outside of such frames of intelligibility” (Hook & Howarth, 2005, p. 508).

I hold that our project, with its multiple-dialogic method and creation of spaces of collective affinity, might offer a possible bridge between CP action methodologies and the work of feminist writers on emotions and connectivity, and perhaps serve as inspiration in other settings of internal colonialism (Lawrence, 2014), generating dialogues between women. In the introductory quote to this paper, Lorde (1984/2012) points to the political power embedded in women’s need to nurture each other. The story of radio-cinema in Sápmi indicates how arenas for creating collective affinity may emerge. Reflecting on the challenges of positionality and methods related to this kind of knowledge production, I seek to advance the understanding of CP and decolonial epistemologies within a specific geopolitical and sociohistorical context.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Colonialism in the Sami-Norwegian context**

Conflicts occur when groups or individuals have opposing interests and cannot reach a consensus (Bar-Tal, 2007). Political systems are in the broadest sense created to regulate such conflicts. Whether or when political systems are seen as failing, and conflict becomes manifest, depends partly on our values and political beliefs. Absence of violent conflict is certainly not synonymous with such positive CP values as well-being, social justice or freedom. In settings of colonial and authoritarian rule, the deepening and/or radicalization of conflicts in society (Awad, 2016; Fanon, 1965) have become tools for populations struggling for peace and social justice

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(Galtung, 1969). When international human rights conventions are violated, this indicates a conflict of interest in a society, even if there are no outbreaks of direct violence. Such situations may include violations of the collective rights of indigenous peoples, as established in ILO Convention 169, caused by conflicting development models, or “life models,” of indigenous peoples and national states (Mignolo, 2011; Stetson, 2012). Among indigenous populations around the world, narratives of conflict, trauma and extermination, and sometimes genocide are manifold (Bastien, Kremer, Kuokkanen, & Vickers, 2003; Moses, 2004). Indigenous communities have resisted mass atrocities, racism and persecution. Today’s modernity project (Mignolo, 2011), with its dependence on resource extraction, threatens the very survival of indigenous peoples and traditional communities.

The Sami-Norwegian context mirrors this global dilemma. Within Sápmi, many Sami cultures have flourished, but state borders restrict Sami political, economic and cultural collaboration and effective exercise of self-determination rights. Norway has no register of ethnicity, but it is estimated that there are between 60 000 and 80 000 Sami in Norway, of a total population of some 5.4 million.

Internal colonialism has similar and differing expressions and consequences for Sami populations between and within nation-states (Spangen, Salmi, Äikäs, & Lehtola, 2015). Although the Norwegian state has offered the Sami apologies for past injustice, this does not automatically translate into awareness within public institutions about the continuing effects of colonialism. The TRC draws public attention to how the Sami community still experience colonial legacies. The Commission follows a trajectory within the expanding field of transitional justice field, where TRC’s went from being tools for justice in post-conflict societies to accounting also for settler colonial societies (Balint, Evans, & McMillan, 2014; Teitel, 2003). Changing expressions of colonial politics respond to shifting international influences, altered national interests, and as public responses to Sami resistance and political strategies. The *Norwegianization* period from 1850 to 1960/1980, initiated within a specific framework of increasing Norwegian state building for national sovereignty. To establish difference from Denmark and Sweden (Spangen et al., 2015), the formation of nationhood became important. From its beginning, the Norwegian government implemented policies aimed at forcing Sami people to adopt the Norwegian language and change the value-structure of their culture and indigenous identity (Hansen & Sørli, 2012; Hansen, Melhus, Høgmo, & Lund, 2008).

While assimilation politics change according to historical shifts, and the explicit Norwegianization epoch has ended; today global neoliberal agendas and extraction industries threaten Sami livelihoods, particularly as regards reindeer herding and fishing rights. For centuries, many Sami followed a nomadic culture, migrating in line with seasonal changes in a harsh climate was common, searching for fishing, gathering- and hunting opportunities and protecting their reindeer herds. Although the Sami today populate cities or smaller settlements, and appropriate technology in their herding activities, complex and inherited knowledge remains at the heart of the herding. This represents one among few remaining spaces for cultural reproduction, and transfer of language, knowledge, artisan craft, epistemologies, communality and spirituality. However, along with mining projects, roads, railways and tourism, the recent onshore windpower-renewables boom on reindeer pasturelands has re-fuelled the Sami–Norwegian conflict. Ailo Keskitalo, president of the Sami Parliament, calls windpower *green colonialism* (Aslaksen & Porsanger, 2017). Will the ongoing TRC process include the colonial mark of current global green agendas? Will the recommendations of the final report, due in 2022, result in meaningful public policies or structural changes? These are open questions.

## **2.2 Decolonizing the Academy debate in Norway**

In 2018, Norway became the setting of a fierce quarrel about “decolonization of the academy”. The initiative came from the Norwegian Students and Academics International

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Assistance Fund (SAIH). Established in 1961 to promote an education for liberation, SAIH enjoys considerable legitimacy in Norway and is partially funded by a percentage of the student fee at state universities. In spring 2018, SAIHs assembly adopted a resolution aimed at decolonizing higher education: “To identify how broader, colonial processes have produced oppressive and asymmetrical structures, systems and dynamics of power, which influence what is considered knowledge, what is lectured and who lectures.”<sup>1</sup> In parallel, the prestigious Peace Research Institute (PRIO) hosted a panel debate on the issue, sparking intense debate. Several professors at the University of Oslo lashed at the decolonizing the academy debate for being an “ideology that attacks the foundations of all science: That it is possible to arrive at universally valid knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> In an op-ed, they requested Norway’s university rectors to reconsider the public funding of SAIH. Initially, the debate drew on lessons from other geographies with different colonial dynamics but this was rapidly followed by efforts to root it in Norwegian realities – entailing a critical review of colonial legacies within academia, particularly against the Sami. In fact, such critiques are nothing new: Sami intellectuals have endorsed this criticism for decades. Scholars have worked for ethical guidelines in indigenous research (Stordahl, Tørres, Møllersen, & Eira-Åhren, 2015), engaged in epistemological debates about traditional knowledge (Balto & Østmo, 2012; Joks & Law, 2017; Law & Joks, 2018; Porsanger, 2004), questioned the silencing of Sami issues in the media and history books (Fjellheim, 2005; Sem, 2017), and discussed what decolonial feminism means for the realities of Sami women (Kuokkanen, 2007).

### 3. Visiting the literature

#### 3.1 *Community Psychology (CP) and Action Research*

Other scholars have reviewed the parallel births and differing paths of CP in various geographies (see Montero, 1996; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Stark, 2019). For the discussion here, it is noteworthy that CPs engagements with developing action research methodologies, is among the places where CP has many parallels to decolonial methodologies, involving constructing a praxis that seeks to transform historical injustice against colonized populations (de Sousa Santos, 2012; Hook, 2004; Smith, 2013).

While classical social psychology targets conflict resolution and reconciliation through interventions aimed at generating inter-group dialogue (Bar-Tal, 2000), CP promoters ground their methodologies in community action aimed at transforming systems of social injustice, oppression, or marginalization (Wallerstein & Duran, 2017). Action Research (AR) is usually traced back to when Kurt Lewin (1946) launched the term in the 1940s, combining strategies of social action to transform real-life problems with diverse experimental approaches in social sciences. Participatory Action Research (PAR), as developed in Latin America, aims at creating macro-structural changes and transformations in the lives of participants and researchers (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), and includes dialogue-centered Freirean (2018) approaches. Paulo Freire influenced the Liberation Psychology originating in the works of the psychologist and Jesuit priest Ignacio Martín-Baró, in war-torn El Salvador (Martín-Baró, 1994). He and other CP classical writers, such as Fanon (1965) elaborated profound inquiries of colonial relations. Liberation Psychology redirects the psychologist’s gaze from individual pathology towards societal pathology, and has inspired many CP promoters to search for a critical and historically situated praxis. This has included explorations into and constructions of adapted versions of

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<sup>1</sup> Public statement, SAIH, 2018, <https://saih.no/artikkel/2018/9/hva-mener-vi-med-avkolonisering-av-hoyere-utdanning> (Retrieved 14.02.2018).

<sup>2</sup> In Norwegian language, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/jPEdLb/Stotter-universitetsrektorene-avkoloniseringsideologien> (Retrieved 14.02.2018).

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Liberation Psychology outside Latin America (Lykes & Moane, 2009), as in the “core capitalist countries” (Burton & Kagan, 2009).

Decolonial thinkers share this *situatedness*. However, while Latin American CP continued elaborating decolonial methodologies alongside social movements (Varas-Díaz & Serrano-García, 2003; Walsh, 2015), in the Global North, decolonial contributions arrived more slowly (Adams, Dobles, Gómez, Kurtiş, & Molina, 2015; Kurtiş & Adams, 2015), explained by the proper situatedness of CP. The transformative intention (Grosfoguel, 2007) embedded in the decolonial “turn,” also connects with CP’s engagements with AR. In addition to the convergence between CP and decolonial scholars working for transformation and emancipation, several discussions resembles each other: as with the focus on the increasing gap between theory and practice in academia; horizontality issues, power relations, and participation (Fine & Torre, 2004); and the institutional constraints on emancipatory praxis, especially given today’s dominant neoliberal logics, when these apply also over academic institutions (Parker, 2014).

### **3.2 (Decolonial and) Feminist inquiries to action research: Towards affective connectivity**

Since the 1990s, scholars have increasingly viewed AR through feminist optics (Fine, 1992; Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009; Maguire, 2006). However, the who’s and how’s of the gap between praxis and theory – at the core of AR intentions – engage but also split some women’s movements and feminist scholarly work (Greenwood & Levin, 2006). Post-colonial, decolonial, class, queer, trans- and intersectionality perspectives have clarified how women’s social realities are marked by various embodied conditions in addition to that of gender (Butler, 1993; Federici, 2004; Lugones, 2010; Spivak, 2002). Some bridges were built, but it became clear that there is no single “feminist subject” (Ahmed, 2003; Kurtiş & Adams, 2015). The construction of a decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2010) is urgent, as many communities are burdened with colonial legacies. In Latin America, indigenous women have questioned Western hegemonic feminism (Martín, 2018; Miñoso, Correal, & Muñoz, 2014); and are constructing decolonial and critical feminisms from *Abya Yala*<sup>3</sup>. Women from Asia and the Middle East have questioned hegemonic Western feminist views on religion (Mahmood, 2011), and black women have offered fundamental criticisms (Carby, 2007). Here I would stress the critical elaborations of Sami scholars on the meaning of a decolonial feminism in the Nordic context (Knoblock & Kuokkanen, 2015; Kuokkanen, 2007, 2008).

Dialogical methods have been pivotal (Caretta & Riaño, 2016), within and between communities of women. The lack of such praxis is among the more profound criticisms against “occidental feminism”. But there are also significant variations: European women have multiple stories of struggle and dispossession, as indicated in the now-classic writings of Federici (2004). The recovery from essentializing, or “othering” (Canales, 2000) – inherent in colonial systems and limiting women’s possibilities to construct a non-patriarchal society – becomes a bi-or multidirectional challenge.

Feminist scholars have also examined interdisciplinary approaches to explaining how oppressive structures grow into embodied experiences. According to Ahmed (2003), in promoting feminist transformations, understanding the dynamics of emotions and constructing through them may assist in creating affective attachments among women. Such affective connectivity has been theorized as potentially generating affective solidarity among women (Hemmings, 2012), in turn fostering transformative action. This “emotional turn” within feminist studies has been criticized for naturalizing those values, which in today’s patriarchal societies, are associated with womanhood; warmth, emotional release, care etc. (Burman, 2006). In response, Clare Hemmings (2012) suggests that it is the “affective *dissonance*” when conflicts emerge between ontology and epistemology – or between our perceived self and the social realm

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<sup>3</sup> Abya Yala is a decolonial term to refer Latin America and the Caribbean region.

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facilitating or limiting our acts – that *might* open up for a “feminist awakening”, resembling the work on critical consciousness in Freirean CP. Also within CP, Varas-Díaz and Serrano-García (2003) have explored the meaning of emotions in the Puerto Rican colonial context. Further, recent International Relations studies have explored the multiple meanings of emotions and dialogue for the transformation of violent conflicts (Head, 2012, 2016), noting the deep roots that link works on emotions with ethics and morals, also in Western philosophic traditions (Aristotle, Plato, Arendt, Habermas). However, in the current positivist and hegemonic paradigm of social sciences, emotions may be reduced to something that should be simply “managed” (Bitsch, 2018).

## 4. Radio-cinema: Action, research and activism

### 4.1 The Radio Project “In Elsa Laula’s Footsteps”

Starting as a basically journalistic project, “In Elsa Laula’s footsteps” (abbr.) evolved through multi-directional dialogues involving the four initial participants, the 23 Sami women who shared their knowledge with the group, listeners/participants in the spaces where radio-cinema was implemented – and, more broadly, the macro-processes discussed in Norwegian public debate. The project’s initial association with journalism rather than research entailed some limitations regarding what parts of the story may be presented. Also, the data derive primarily from dialogues at events involving many participants, and from written interviews of the four participants in the initiating group (see below).

*The initiating group.* Despite differing professional backgrounds and political beliefs, the four women who initiated the project all support core values of CP, such as social justice, well-being and liberation. Our group met several years earlier, in connection with solidarity work in Latin America, through grassroots organizations struggling against violations of human rights. Having spent years outside Norway, three of us (non-Sami) became aware of our lack of knowledge about colonial legacies in Norway – thereby spurring this project. Two of us are doctoral candidates in psychology and indigenous studies, and conduct research that intersects, thematically, with the project. A third person is a journalist and researcher; the fourth is an architect, with experience in reporting as an activist tool for social transformation. Here I employ the pseudonyms Pia, Sara, Maria and Mina, without further details, to preserve anonymity concerning the extracts from the data set.

#### *Phase one: Broadcast Sami women’s multiple voices*

The project started in 2017, after the 100th anniversary of the first Sami assembly, which had been held in Trondheim, February 6, 1917. Back then, a leader had been Elsa Laula Renberg, who fought for Sami rights to reindeer pasturing and education. That is why we called our project “In Elsa Laula’s footsteps through Sápmi: 100 years of Sami struggle for rights.” In alliance with the Oslo-based feminist radio RadiOrakel, and with funding from the Fritt Ord Foundation, and later the Sami Parliament in Norway, we travelled through Sápmi, crossing the borders of Norway, Sweden and Finland. Helped by “snowballing”, we came in contact with 23 Sami women of all ages (19–83), involved in pioneering work in academia, language, pastoralism, handicrafts and art, activism, politics, music, and theatre. In this process, we relied mainly on our Sami member’s networks. We visited the majority in their houses or on-site and undertook audio-recorded interviews, in the shape of informal conversations, about the topics of their expertise.

The intention was to collect material for the radio project, not to conduct research; hence, ethical guidelines for journalism, and not research, were followed. The constructed meaning

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during those conversations aimed at sharing their specific expertise, and was not directly related to the explorations in this paper. This defines the “status” of these Sami women in the present context: they were not interviewees, but experts who provided valuable insights in this project. When these conversations are referred to below, it is because they are backed up by other data sources.

These visits often started with the woman explaining about her particular field of expertise, but often became encounters that left us with strong impressions, including sadness. Often, food or coffee was served, and this sharing of thoughts, food, space, and emotions encouraged us to take the project further, including the explorations in this paper. Brief visits to other areas completed our initial three-week journey.

After extensive discussions among the four of us, focused on ethical and political considerations, four episodes of the radio documentary, each approximately 25 minutes, emerged. The first, called “400 skulls – 400 bullet-holes”, reflects how the Norwegian state ignores Sami knowledge in reindeer pasturing regulations; and how a woman, through political art, follows her brother’s trial against the state, relating the situation to the historical genocide of North American indigenous populations and the extermination of the buffalos so central to their survival. The second episode, “A picture can transform,” concerns the history of “scientific racism” and the TRC process; the third episode, “Let the mountains live,” focuses on the clashes between extraction industries and indigenous ecologies. The final episode, titled “Delvieh” (“what was hidden, but reappears”), is about how young Sami women struggle to recover their language, music and territorial rights.<sup>4</sup>

I detail the scope of these episodes, to give readers an idea of the content of our dialogues. Importantly, the focus of this article is on the processes and dialogues occurring between spaces and groups of people – not on the edited content of the radio episodes, or the 23 interviews.<sup>5</sup> However, by sharing their expertise with us, those women became a significant element in the knowledge production. The project is part of a longer process, and we continue to meet in spaces where Sami struggle is constructed or discussed (e.g. seminars, festivals, protests, trials etc.). Moreover, at each step of the project, we have consulted with the women, who have approved the edited episodes, while several of them have joined us in radio-cinema presentations.

### *Phase two: Growing into radio-cinema – A decolonial learning project*

In February 2018, the project took a decisive turn from broadcasting Sami women’s multiple voices, when we were invited to a documentary film festival. In the Oslo Literature House, and the Sami House, two episodes were presented, followed by panel discussions on colonialism and media coverage of Sami issues. This sudden visibility called for careful reflection about the learning potentials and possible pitfalls of radio-cinema as a tool for engaging people in dialogues. Exposure in the social media triggered new invitations to various social spaces. That the first invitation had come from a film festival encouraged our own understanding of the project as radio-cinema. We would ask listeners to close their eyes while they listened to an episode, and to use their imagination, thereby inviting them to a dialogue about their impressions.

We have presented radio-cinema in museums, restaurants, a bar, at Sami festivals, cinema, art galleries, markets and seminars, a cave, a church, and feminist spaces in Norway and abroad (as March 8<sup>th</sup> in a Zapatista territory in southern Mexico in 2018), student assemblies, a prison, and academic spaces of decolonial thinking. These differing spaces enable dialogues with a range of individuals and communities, prompting deeper reflection on the meaning of togetherness,

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<sup>4</sup> The radio chapters are described (in Norwegian) on the blog: <https://elsalaulasfotospor.com>

<sup>5</sup> As noted, the conversations took place in the context of a radio project, which is why their actual content is excluded in the analysis.

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collective listening and dialogue. Often, our group has not been able to determine the physical conditions during presentations, but by arranging chairs in circles, preparing simple food, or dimming the lights, we have tried to provide settings where people could concentrate. Several times, listeners/participants have challenged the project. In turn, their input led us to change the editing of the final episodes of the documentary, and how we imagine radio-cinema. Listeners have said that they appreciated being able to close their eyes and engage with the episodes, which combine narratives, interviews and traditional Sami music and poetry – and afterwards, take part in conversations. Many listeners/participants mentioned how these events represented a break with the visual saturation in today's society, and many noted the positive aspect of feeling *togetherness*. Several times, listeners became visibly emotional, even weeping, and our impression has been that *something* in the situation made many decide to be highly personal in their reflections, even in spaces shared between Sami and non-Sami participants. These observations motivated the present paper, as to further explore the meaning of these spaces.

#### ***4.2 Collecting and analyzing the data set***

This article builds on a mixed data set: fieldnotes, minutes, e-mail correspondence, and audio recordings from the dialogues after presentations. A semi-structured, written interview was conducted with the group's four members (including myself, at the request of the other three). The interview's items were created on the basis of recurrent or unresolved themes in fieldnotes, correspondence and tape recordings. Written interviews were analyzed thematically and inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006), given its theoretical flexibility, suitable because of the explorative research question; and the improvisational character of the project – it was not grounded in a specific epistemology in the planning phases. Confronted with the unusual situation of analyzing transcripts containing my own reflections, I asked a colleague to analyze the written interviews, a proceeding similar to inter-coder reliability (Cornish, Gillespie, & Zittoun, 2013). Our ensuing discussions showed agreement on the themes, with slightly different wording. The other group-members read and commented on the manuscript.

### **5. Results**

Three recurrent themes emerged from an inductive and both semantical and latent (Braun & Clarke, 2006) interpretation of the data set: “recognition as a foundation for dialogue”, “safe spaces for multiple dialogues to occur”, and “negotiating belonging in a colonial context.”

#### ***5.1. Recognition as a foundation for dialogue***

Hemmings (2012) points to tensions within feminist scholarship regarding such matters as empathy, essentializing, and recognition. Our group's discussions and uncertainties about how to understand our own work might reflect such tensions. The aim of learning from women's expertise was clear from the beginning, and derived partly from our affiliation with a feminist radio channel (RadiOrakel) that questions the weak representation of women in Norwegian media. Despite improvements since the 1980s, only 24% as of 2015.<sup>6</sup> This relative exclusion contrasts with the case of Sami women, who generally have strong political representation within their communities and in Sami media.

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<sup>6</sup> Reported on the blog forskning.no, which broadcasts research results. <https://forskning.no/likestilling-medievitenskap-kjonn-og-samfunn/faerre-kvinner-i-media/455908> (Retrieved: 04.02.2018).

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A photo taken at the first Sami assembly in 1917 shows that half of the persons in the picture were women. This contrasted with the reality for Norwegian parliamentary politics in the same decade, as Norwegian women had gained the right to vote in general elections only four years earlier. Understanding the causes and challenges for the relatively strong position of Sami women has motivated us throughout the project. As “Maria” puts it: “Seen with Norwegian eyes, it’s a feminist project, in the sense that this project is trying to unveil the narratives, truths and realities told by women, in a world where the stories have been told, and still are, from a man’s perspective.” This echoes RadiOrakel’s viewpoint. “Pia” noted that selecting only women for dialogue had “Created a unique space for safety and trust, a kind of sisterhood.”

She continued:

I believe it has been important that not all participants are Sami themselves. This created another affinity for us, as women. For me, it seemed more natural, not a specifically political position, to work with a women’s perspective. Later, and with all the dialogues with the women and among ourselves in the group, the political element got stronger. It has been instructive.

Our interaction with one small community illustrates the ethical considerations involved. That community had experienced a series of historical injustices, including “scientific racism” and phrenology in the 1920s; forced removal from Sami settlements in the 1960s; and being forbidden to speak their language. Recently, the distressing revelations of multiple cases of sexual abuse, partly involving members of a strict religious community, had made the headlines in Norwegian and international media. The community was in the beginning of a complex process to attain justice and recover.

We discussed whether to cover these stories, as the women we interviewed had some knowledge about/relation to the case. However, we felt hesitant about coming from the outside, and asking about something painful, already exposed in the Norwegian media. Instead, we opted to draw attention to the excellent work done by young Sami individuals to recover their language, which has been on the UNESCO list of endangered languages threatened with extinction. Nevertheless, we were uncertain whether the choice of not taking up the disturbing accounts of sexual abuse might somehow mean silencing, or ignoring, the voices of those who had suffered the violence and had only recently started to denounce it.

In initial conversations with the Sami women, we posed no direct questions concerning *womanhood*. We wanted to recognize these women for their merits, in line with Lugones’ view that feminism should move beyond oppression, “providing materials that enable women to understand their situation without succumbing to it”(Lugones, 2010, p. 747). Regardless, some of the women had, on their own initiative, talked about acting not only as Sami, but as Sami *and* women. Some had noted how women resist being pushed out of the traditional reindeer herding because of the technological underpinnings and recent law reforms individualizing herding – which Sami feminist scholars have identified as violent structures that Nordic feminists have ignored (Knoblock & Kuokkanen, 2015).

We may have lacked the readiness to look beyond the “strong Sami woman” in the project, even when one woman had questioned our use of “strong women” during an interview. She pointed out how “the strong women label” could be misleading and essentializing, a point to which we returned in our group discussions. However, we did not focus on the underlying tensions between the strong political representation among Sami women on the one hand, and on the other, the alarming statistics on violence against Sami women (NIM, 2018).

“Pia” later reflected on how the dialogical spaces opened up during the process had made her think about LHBT issues and violence against women. Also “Sara” noted emotional un-ease on this omission. However, she saw the project as a first approximation: “dialogue must begin somewhere, and trust must be created, before stories of violence can be shared safely.”

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## 5.2 Safe spaces for multiple dialoging

The dialogic methodology evolving in our project used radio-cinema as an input into multiple dialogues resembling Freirian approaches of *concientización* (Freire, 2018). These multi-dialogues can also be seen as a social constructivist Bakhtinian approach, where multidirectional “utterances combine and challenge each other in flexible and unfinished multiple dialogic scenes” (Rule, 2011). The dialogues took place between people, responding to and challenging macro-societal narratives, such as the decolonizing the Academy debate. Dialoging also fostered learning:

(..) First, it’s a communication process where learning goes in all directions. We learn from those we interviewed, maybe they learn something after meeting us, and then we share what we learned through radio-cinema, where the learning is bidirectional, too. (“Mina”)

As mentioned, the project was not initially constructed as a bi- or multi-directional learning processes involving dialogues in various socio-cultural settings. The dialogical focus emerged after the invitation to the film festival. All participants saw the improvisational character of the project as something positive, without being “locked” into any specific methodology or plan.

While emphasizing improvisation and co-construction of narratives, our group has remained responsible for editing the radio episodes and (co)creating the spaces where the dialogues occur.<sup>7</sup> These spaces were constructed through symbols and signs, for example, sitting in a circle, closing one’s eyes, dimming the lights, and the choice of traditional Sami music to open each episode. These symbols become *actions* (Montero, 2002), together with the textual narratives about structural violence and resistance, providing meaning and direction to the collective dialogues. One listener noted how collective listening while seated in a circle, resembled the Sami oral tradition, where the elderly tell stories to the young people by the fireside inside traditional circular dwellings.” Seemingly an innovative methodology, it meant, for him, a return to older oral traditions. After attending a workshop of artists and researchers, another person said that listening while closing her eyes had made her “connect with the voices I heard, and imagine the pain, through almost sensorial connectivity.” In response, “Pia” answered:

It just happened, it felt natural to do it, and we’ve fallen in love with this material and having people come together. Today there is too much visual saturation; it’s impossible to concentrate. That’s why we’ve tried to strip it down, make it simple, just come together and listen. This might be something that’s lacking in society today, listening more than arguing.

We also felt that our group became a space where trust could allow difficult dialogues to unfold. It was important to acknowledge our different backgrounds, and the tensions that might arise around certain decisions. The non-Sami participants tried to be sensitive to the Sami participant’s opinions or resistance towards certain decisions. In a sense, our group became the *prefiguring* (Kagan & Burton, 2000) of some decolonial and feminist methodologies, based on dialogues, and sensitive to positionality. Its intercultural composition probably gave our group legitimacy in the many spaces into which we were invited or accepted. Some of the women we interviewed made it clear that they would have felt differently about receiving us if one member of our group had not been Sami herself. Although pivotal to feminism is constant reflection on power relations, and their de-construction (Ackerly & True, 2010), our group has not engaged in

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<sup>7</sup> Aware of the differing meanings of “space” in feminist research, here I employ a flexible definition, as including room, time, and collectivity where dialogues occur.

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closer examination of the power relations among ourselves, except the Sami/non-Sami dichotomy. Informal power relations in affinity groups might be as limiting for social transformation as formal hierarchy in vertical movements (Sutherland, Land, & Böhm, 2014) or in the researcher– community relationship (Fine & Torre, 2004). To take the further steps that “Sara” envisaged, it might have been critical to consider carefully the power relations that could affect not only ourselves but also the spaces we constructed and the dialogues that were generated.

### ***5.3 Negotiating belonging in a colonial context***

The decolonizing the academy debate called on Norwegians to reflect on their country’s colonial entanglements against the Sami population. Colonialism was discussed in all four episodes of our radio documentary – for instance, epistemological violence (Teo, 2008), the bio-politics of the forced reduction of Sami reindeer herds in Finnmark county (Reinert, 2012; Benjaminsen, Reinert, Sjaastad, & Sara, 2015), or the scientific racism of the 1920s and 30s (Kyllingstad, 2012). While emphasizing colonialism is inevitable in a project like this one, our discourse on decolonization was furthered by the parallel decolonizing the academy debate, and we were invited to several public spaces to contribute to that discussion.

“Sara” said she felt “relief” at being able to contribute “something concrete,” without all the “abstract arguments” typical of public debates. “Pia” underlined how the project has “sought social transformation, so central to Action Research and parts of the decolonizing the academy debate”. The parallel debate offered a sense of belonging to a new affinity community.

Questioning colonialism was not a straightforward or easy process. While belongingness was valued, colonial ruptures and non-belonging also became evident. “Mina” reflected on the tensions and difficult emotions generated by the process:

To enter, physically and mentally, a process where we are confronted with our colonization is decolonizing (...) I am a part of the colonization, and my ignorance results from that. Seeking knowledge, understanding and spreading it is a decolonizing work. It has been powerful to meet Sami women who talk about me as a “Norwegian” woman. I hadn’t been aware of the distance, and I still can’t understand it fully. Being “the other” and being “othered” is hard when it’s not your chosen position. It’s been an exercise, trying to see and understand how Sami women view me. I am different, I am not one of them, I do not have the same experiences, and even when some things can build a bridge, we are on the opposite sides in a process that created privileges. *I am the privilege, if being part of that nation-state is a privilege.*

“Sara” elaborates further:

I have developed a repulsion against “Norwegian”, whatever that is, and I think that in this binary relation it’s terribly uncomfortable to be depict as “the Norwegian” (...) no, it’s obviously not pleasant to be inside colonial relations, and maybe the discomfort that I feel is important. Maybe I haven’t yet managed to transform those uneasy feelings into something emancipatory. Maybe we haven’t yet a really trust-based dialogue. Maybe we haven’t had the time or the courage to take this a few steps further.

“Maria” remembers when she understood that she needed to reflect on her *own* role, and sees this as a turning point. It happened during an interview with an older, academic Sami woman:

The meeting with her became important for me, a turning point in coming to understand my role. (...) I went from being an observer/an object to being a subject, understanding

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myself as a part of the context, and the stories that are being told, and the political and communitarian processes underway in Sápmi and Norway today.[...] If the Norwegian people are to regain their dignity, the Sami people must also regain their dignity. Meeting the older Sami woman got me to reflect about what dignity can be, and my own role.

These reflections exemplify what Hemmings (2012) describes as the movement from a position of witnessing, to a place of intersubjective recognition. While the earlier quotes indicate both reflexivity and ambivalence, “Maria” seems to be moving from an experience of affective dissonance, or unease in grasping her own historical role, to a place where she finds it possible to construct mutual recognition. For Hemmings (2012), this paves the way for constructing affective solidarity – between women, or between communities.

## 6. Discussion

Recalling the motivation underlying this explorative article: is there a place in the academic setting for such a hybrid project? And what are the possible theoretical or methodological contributions to refining CP Action Research methods in contexts of colonial conflict? I have given priority to descriptions, not in-depth theoretical discussions.

However, some findings seem worth reflecting on, and may possibly inspire future research or in developing methodology. First, the works on epistemologies of the South noted here, although developed in the Latin American context, can inspire a rethinking of CP in the Nordic context, with the “Global South” as a metaphor for the suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism (and the resistance to these) – not as a geographical concept (de Sousa Santos, 2012). Second, CP critical thinkers highlight the need for socio-historically engaged praxis. Whereas dialogue has been at the heart of PAR for decades, in our context radio-cinema mobilized individuals and communities into discussing colonial legacies and resistance, perhaps helping them to construct knowledge and narratives about macro-societal processes within this colonial context. The contribution of our improvisational methodology to staking out more creative methodologies (Glăveanu & Sierra, 2015) may lie in its hybridity. As put by Maldonado-Torres (2011, p. 1):

...arguably, because of its emancipatory goals and its suspension of method, the decolonial turn cannot be fully contained in single units of study, or captured within the standard division of labor between disciplines or areas in the traditional arts and sciences.

Third, these narratives and meanings were facilitated through constructing spaces, by various symbols and signs, not only text (Montero, 2002). The prefiguring of the initiating group (Kagan & Burton, 2000), through our Sami/non-Sami composition, might have become a symbol here. This makes for an interesting dialogue, both as regards Wilson's work (2008) on indigenous methodologies, of research as ceremony, and with Hemming's (2012) work on affective solidarity.

Fourth, it has been useful to explore feminist works on emotion and affect in interpreting the empirical findings of our study (Ahmed, 2003; Hemmings, 2012). They may well have relevance to Action Research methods in CP aimed at fostering dialogues between women in colonial contexts.

However, some puzzles remain. By “stripping it down,” as “Pia” says; making careful selections of music and settings, our group sought to provide intimate spaces for listening, connectivity and critical dialogue. In a core capitalist country like Norway (Burton & Kagan, 2009), people might be deprived of such spaces, but displaying emotions in a neoliberal context can also be problematized (Vrasti, 2011). How can we know if this “collective escape” from “visual saturation” can promote the affective solidarity that Clare Hemming (2012) recommends? She warns that empathy without recognition of the other's political demands (and

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without feminist reflexivity!) might be extremely uncomfortable for the recipient. Affective dissonance does not automatically bring us together – it may also push us apart. I recall a presentation where two artists wanted to discuss the production with us. They were chatting enthusiastically about the texture of the sound in one of the radio episodes, and said they were interested in creating synergies with us. I could not help thinking of the sharp contrast between that conversation and the realities of Sami reindeer herders, struggling for cultural survival, confronted with extraction industries operating in the name of climate change mitigation, and I wondered whether we had failed to confront privileges and power structures sufficiently.

A second puzzle: when I first described the project to a non-psychologist colleague, her immediate reaction was: “Oh, like a therapy group.” At first that sounded a disqualifying statement, calling the transformative perspectives into question. Yet, her comment calls for deeper reflection. In colonial societies, pathologies might be social, and transformation requires social action (Martín-Baró, 1994). As colonial traumas permeate relations in the context of this study (Pihama et al., 2014), perhaps some listeners experienced these collective listening’s as therapeutic, particularly given the “therapeutic turn” in Western society (Madsen, 2014). That would place greater ethical responsibility on our group. While the relative autonomy from institutional constraints permitted improvisations and flexibility, that might also have made us less prepared. After the radio-cinema sessions, people returned to their daily activities, and we have had little further contact with most listeners/participants.

Perhaps the most challenged individuals are ourselves, we who have been negotiating feelings of shame, and trying to handle the tensions between belonging, affective solidarity, and otherness within and between our communities of *womanhood*, *Saminess*, and *Norwegianess*. One of our group is herself Sami, and her distress differed from ours: it was related to making erroneous interpretations, or committing ethical errors, or entering polemic questions in a wrong way, which could have deeper consequences for her than for the rest of us. Ahmed (2018) notes how oppressive structures become internalized through feelings. Feelings are not about the “inside” or the “outside”, but about how we connect, our social responses. In this perspective, this distress is a response to the genuine political hostility produced by colonialism. The emotional responses occurring throughout this multidirectional project are social responses to, and part of, the dialogues that occur and are being constructed.

## 7. Conclusions

Lorde (1984/2012) envisages connectivity is among women's potential strengths against patriarchy. In this article, I have analyzed our ongoing project through the lens of decolonial and feminist work in combination with CP dialogical methods. This reading points toward the radio-cinema project in safe(r) spaces as a vehicle for generating mutual recognition, connectivity and affective solidarity among women in this colonial context – for Hemmings (2012), possible precursors to social action. As of this writing, we are translating the episodes into Spanish, to spread information about the Sami struggle to grassroots organizations in Latin America. We are also planning to transform the episodes into pedagogical tools for school use.

I hope these initial reflections from an ongoing project can contribute to re-thinking, creatively and with an open mind, CP engagements with working for solidarity between women in contexts of internal colonialism, where strengthening diversity and community (Mannarini & Salvatore, 2019) is vitally important. Today, confronted with neoliberalism, extractivism, ecological crises and the growth of authoritarian and fascist regimes, a critical and creative CP’s engagement with these issues continues to be pressing.

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