

Dear Samuel,

We met you in Vevring, Norway in September 2018, while working on a film about a planned open pit mine in the Engebø Mountain, and dumping of mining waste and chemicals in the Førde fjord.

You were there to learn about how local initiatives and environmental organisations struggled to fight the mining project, and about the possibility of addressing Norwegian authorities concerning the environmental disaster in your own home town, Barcarena in the State of Para in Brazil. A disaster caused by flooding of waste deposits at the Norwegian owned aluminium refinery Hydro Alunorte. You told us that there had been several incidents where spills from Alunorte had contaminated the soil and drinking water in the nearby area. Furthermore, the consequences of the contamination was that people there no longer could catch fish in the river or grow crops, and that the extended consequences were forced evictions, loss of local identity, poverty and illnesses.

When looking into it we found that the aluminium production in Para is not only accused of contaminating the local area around the plant and waste disposal, but is also responsible for indirectly causing massive deforestation in the Amazon forest. The bauxite mine that provides the Hydro Alunorte refinery with raw material is situated in the middle of what was meant to be protected rainforest.

Aluminium can be said to be the most important metal of our time, and Hydro Alunorte is the largest aluminium refinery in the world, - a highly valuable asset for the state of Norway. It's a private company, where the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries owns 34,26 % of the shares. It means that 34,26 % of the profit is injected into the Norwegian economy, in order to benefit the welfare of Norwegian citizens.

Samuel, as a Brazilian environmental activist, is risking a lot when standing up for his community to fight against what is destroying the livelihood of his people. In Norway activists can safely speak up about social and environmental concerns. This is not the case in Brazil, -in 2019, 220 activists got killed for defending their land and environments.

Norwegians live in a highly functional democracy where we in theory should have the power to influence decision making through democratic processes. Our elected politicians are supposed to represent the people, so consequently one could say that Norway's profiting on the destruction of rainforest and contamination of land in the Amazon is done with the blessing of the majority of Norwegian citizens.

We learn in school that colonialism is a historical period, starting in the 16th century and ending in 1960. Are we lacking a vocabulary for understanding and discussing what is happening today?

How would you, from your perspective, describe the Norwegian state ownership in Hydro Alunorte, its activities in the State of Para and the distribution of costs and benefits between the inhabitants in our respective geographical locations? How would you define development? How do you see the future of Barcarena? Where do we set limits for how far our responsibility and empathy should reach?

Three versions of this letter have been sent to individuals that represent different interests in Alunorte's activities. As a local environmental activist, who lives nearby the Alunorte plant in Barcarena, you represent the contaminated water, the land, the plants, the fish, the animals and the people that are suffering from Hydro Alunorte's activities. A second letter has been sent to Iselin Nybø, the Norwegian Minister of Trade and Industry. She represents the main shareholders in Hydro Alunorte. Her responsibility is to distribute the profit that is made from the aluminium production to maintain and improve the welfare of the Norwegian nation. A third letter has been sent to the director of Hydro Alunorte. He represents Alunorte as a business, where the ultimate goal is to run the refinery in a way that maximises long term profit for its shareholders.

The letters are part of an art project, where we, as Norwegian citizens, consider ourselves to represent the profiteers.

We would highly appreciate to hear your opinion on these matters.

Kind regards,  
Kristin Astrup Aas and Kjersti Vetterstad