

Beta Cinema
Presents

ELLOS EATNU - LA ELVA LEVE
LET THE RIVER FLOW

A FILM BY OLE GLÆVER

DRAMA – 2K – 5.1 – SÁMI/NORWEGIAN – 124 minutes

Starring
Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen

Produced by
Maria Ekerhovd

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

During summer 1979, Ester moves to Alta in Northern Norway to begin teaching at an elementary school. Like many Sámi at the time, she is ashamed of her heritage and conceals her ethnicity. Ester goes to great lengths to fit in, even joining in with the derogatory jokes. When her cousin Mikkhál takes her to a camp by the Alta River where people are demonstrating against the building of a dam, Ester learns how the fight for the river is also a revolt against the years of brutal racism and discrimination against her people. After a major confrontation with the police, Mikkhál and some other Sámi decide to go to Oslo to hunger strike in front of the Parliament. Knowing what is at stake, Ester realises it is time to make a stand...

LET THE RIVER FLOW is a drama based on real events that inspired a whole generation of young Norwegians to stand up. A gripping and moving portrayal of the indigenous people's struggle for survival, a fight still going on today.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In the summer of 1979, Ester (23) moves to Alta in Northern Norway to begin teaching at an elementary school. Like many Sámi at the time, she is ashamed of her heritage and conceals her ethnicity. Ester goes to great lengths to fit in, even joining in with the derogatory jokes.

The only person Ester knows in Alta is her cousin Mihkkál. He takes Ester to a protest camp by the Alta River where people are demonstrating against the building of a dam approved by the Norwegian government. The Alta River is Northern Europe's richest salmon-producing river and a lasting source of life for the Sámi. Ester learns how the fight for the river is also a revolt against the years of brutal racism and discrimination against the Sámi people.

Ester continues to join Mihkkál at the demonstrations, while keeping a low profile at work. After a major confrontation with the police, Mikkhál and some other Sámi decide to go to Oslo to hunger strike in front of the Parliament. Knowing what is at stake, Ester realises it is time to make a stand, and she joins them. The Sámi protest gathers momentum and is featured all over the news. A compromise is reached, and the government promises to postpone the development while Sámi rights in Norway are investigated.

Back in Alta, Ester realizes that the fight is far from over. Now everyone knows that Ester is Sámi, and she is subjected to racism and stigmatization. Even her own Sámi mother will not support her, believing it is easier to just be Norwegian.

One year later, the government breaks their promise. In the middle of a cold winter, a crucial battle is fought between police and activists, between the Norwegian state and the Sámi. Now

Ester is at the front of the barricades to protect the river. It is not just her own life that is at stake, but the survival of the entire Sámi people.

While they may have lost the fight for the river, she has begun to reconcile with her true identity.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I had just turned two years old when the first activists sat down and blocked the construction road in the summer of 1979.

As I started researching and meeting activists, historians, and other people who played a part, a range of stories appeared. But there was one story that cried out to be told: the story of the Norwegian government's continued, brutal abuse of the Sámi. When I met Jorunn Eikjok and Synnøve Persen, who risked their lives in a hunger strike in front of the Norwegian Parliament, my heart started pounding and tears welled up. For them, the Alta-case was not just about the continued existence of the river, but about the continued existence of an entire people.

The assimilation policy, or Norwegianisation as it's been called, has been so brutal and effective that many Sámis felt they had no other choice than to become Norwegians, especially along the coast of Finnmark where the confrontations between the Norwegians and the Sámi were particularly bad.

Though the Alta-conflict was a turning point in the fight for Sámi rights, and has given new generations stronger confidence and proudness of their Sámi identity, the Sámi people are still fighting to preserve Sámi culture, language and livelihood, like the ongoing demonstrations against the windmill-park at Fosen. It's more than 500 days since all 14 members of the Supreme Court unanimously decided that the windmill-park is illegal. Yet the Norwegian government has done nothing to remove them. Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen, who plays the lead in "Let the River Flow" is now one of the front-activists blocking the offices of the Ministry of Oil and Energy. Greta Thunberg has also joined the demonstrations counting hundreds of activists. In a way history is repeating itself. Though the events of the film happened 40 years ago, the same conflicts are just as actual today, not only in Norway but in many parts of the world.

Ole Giæver

BIOs

DIRECTOR AND WRITER OLE GIÆVER

Ole Giæver (b.1977) studied at the Nordland Art and Film College and Konstfack Art Academy in Stockholm. His feature debut *The Mountain* (2011), was selected for Panorama at the Berlinale. His second feature *Out of Nature* (2015) premiered at Toronto and in Panorama at the Berlinale, where it won the Europa Cinemas Label Award. He returned to the Berlinale in 2017 with *From the Balcony* (2017), which was also selected for Panorama. *Let the River Flow* (2023) debuted at the Film Festival in Tromsø, winning the Audience Award. It also won the Audience- and Fipresci Award at the Film Festival in Göteborg.

ACTOR ELLA MARIE HÆTTA ISAKSEN

Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen is a Sámi musician and activist. In 2017 Isaksen started the band ISÁK. In October 2018 she won the TV-show Stjernekamp (Battle of the Star). LET THE RIVER FLOW is her debut feature film as an actor.

Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen is also a Sámi activist and at the front line of demonstrations for Sámi rights, shutting down the Norwegian ministry of oil and energy for several days in the winter of 2023.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is not possible to understand the impact of the Alta-case from a Sámi perspective without going back to 1851 when the policy of Norwegianisation was enacted – the goal of which was to assimilate the Sámi population. Sámi children were isolated from their parents and sent to boarding schools with the intention of turning them into Norwegians. They were forced to stop speaking Sámi and subjected to harsh discrimination and racism. The stigmatization and oppression were so brutal, and persisted for so many generations, that many started hiding their Sámi roots. Being Sámi was shameful.

The Sámi who participated in the demonstration at Stilla and in the hunger strike in front of the parliament lost the fight against the development but won the support of the people. Most Norwegians did not know how the government had treated the Sámi, or the fact that Norway is a colonial power. We still teach little, almost nothing, about Sámi culture and history in Norwegian schools. Knowledge about our own indigenous people and what they have been subjected to, has not been properly transmitted to new generations. In spite of the events of the film being 40 years removed in time, there are still many Sámi like Ester today, who have had their identity taken away or don't know or don't want to admit that they are Sámi. The Sámi still lose their rights to grazing areas and are subject to racist attitudes.

When the story of Ester begins, in the summer of 1979, she has ambivalent feelings about her Sámi identity. She has left her childhood home, speaks Norwegian, and hides the fact that she is Sámi. It is when Ester discovers the government's planned development of the watercourse in the Alta river and how this relates to several hundred years of colonization and Norwegianisation of Sámi land and culture that the "animal inside of her" is awakened. The fight against the development of the Alta-Kautokeino watercourse is not just a personal battle to protect the nature and culture that she was so strongly connected to as a child, it is a fight on the behalf of an entire people. During the span of the film Ester goes from hiding her Sámi identity, to being willing to sacrifice her life to protect Sámi rights.

COLLECTIVE ACTION & CLIMATE

The Alta-case took place over two years, it involved people of all political persuasions and walks of life, both in and outside of the country. Never has a single issue managed to mobilize so many people to protest. The Alta-case combined environmental battle with the fight for indigenous rights, illuminated public opinion, changed policy and challenged the power of the government. I believe that we need to be reminded of the potential that exists in ourselves and our fellow citizens, a potential to change the society and the world that we are part of.

Ole Giæver

THE POLITICAL SITUATION TODAY

The issues in ELLOS EATNU - LET THE RIVER FLOW are still prevalent today and Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen is currently protesting against wind turbines built on land traditionally used by Indigenous Sami reindeer herders. Norway's supreme court in 2021 ruled that two wind farms built at Fosen in central Norway violated Sami rights under international conventions, but the turbines remain in operation more than 16 months later.

Since 23 February 2023, Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen has been amongst protestors occupying governmental buildings in Oslo, Norway. They have been denied food, dragged away by police, but still the protest continues and the supporters are growing in number and gaining international coverage. Greta Thunberg has also joined the protest against these illegal wind farms.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greta-thunberg-detained-by-norway-police-during-demonstration-2023-03-01/>

https://amnesty.no/aksjon/samenes-kultur-kan-forsvinne?utm_campaign=later-linkinbio-amnesty_norge&utm_content=later-33340611&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkin.bio

Greta Thunberg detained by Norway police during pro-Sami protest

By Gwladys Fouche



[3/4] Greta Thunberg is carried away by police officers as activists demonstrate outside the Ministry of Finance entrance and several other ministries in protest against the Fosen wind turbines not being demolished, which was built on land traditionally used by indigenous Sami reindeer herders, in Oslo, Norway, March 1, 2023. Alf Simensen/NTB/via REUTERS **Read less**



Politiet fjerner artist og aktivist Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen fra Olje- og energidepartementet.

Foto: Natur og Ungdom



ellamariehi

Olje- og energidepartementet (Norge)



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ellamariehi Today we successfully have shut down the Norwegian ministry of petroleum and energy! 🙌
#BaajhVaerideÅrrodh Foto: Natur og Ungdom

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CAST

Ester	Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen
Mihkkal	Gard Emil
Risten	Sofia Jannok
Piera	Beaska Niillas
Marit	Marie Kvernmo
Stein	Finn Arve Sørbøe
Thomas	William Sigvaldsen
Áhkku	Mary Sarre
Gøran	Ivar Beddari
Principal	Maria Bock
Ailu	Robert Amadeus Gaup Mienna
Ailu's Father	Mikkel Gaup

CREW

Written and directed by

OLE GLÆVER

Producer

MARIA EKERHOVD

Executive Producer

AXEL HELGELAND

Co-producers

LIZETTE JONJIC, MISHA JAARI, MARK LWOFF, KRISTINE M.I. KNUDSEN,
ALEXANDER SOMMA, ØYSTEIN MOE, LINE KLUNGSETH JOHANSEN

Director of Photography

MARIUS MATZOW GULBRANDSEN, FNF

Costume design

NELL KNUDSEN

Production Designers

RAGNHILD JULIANE SLETTA & CECILIE DE LANGE

Make-up design

SALLA YLI-LUOPA

Editor

WIBECKE RØNSETH, NFK

Composers

OLA FLØTTUM & PESSI LEVANTO

Sound design

BENT HOLM

VFX supervisor

ALEXANDER SOMMA

Casting

NINA ERDAHL

Line producers

BENTE MAALEN & JEANETTE SUNDBY

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