

Dálkke Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Re-searching healthy and sustainable environments

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This ongoing meta-research project spans three lands using multiple methods to document Indigenous perspectives on climate change and the need for societal change to realign with the sovereign knowledges of First Nation Peoples. For the purpose of this presentation we focus on two Indigenous territories (Sápmi and Australia) with a discussion on the how the project was created, the methodologies used and the stories that have emerged. Knowledge of lands and waters is inherent in Sámi culture and transferred between generations. Change of climate is a normal part of livelihood, to which Sámi have adapted through constant reorganisations. However, what makes it troublesome today is the destructive practices of the settler colonial state, radically diminishing the space for adaptation and resilience. Similarly, in Australia the project found that Aboriginal people have shared knowledge over millennium on how the environment changes and how to change with it, to care for it and each other through safe ecological practises including, for example, fire mitigation. This presentation is a story of the research but also a conversation between two Indigenous scholars who work together from opposites sides of the world; from lands of ice and fire (Öhman & Wyld, 2014), who find that it is the desire for sustainable communities within colonised lands that creates common ground and academic purpose.

The meta-project is based within CEMFOR (Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies on Racism) at Uppsala University in Sweden but the researchers, when possible, have travelled their lands to bear witness to stories of climate change passed down through generations alongside examples of the negative colonial impact on the natural environment. We talk to Sámi reindeer herders alongside Indigenous custodians of waterways and landscapes who are struggling to maintain traditional ways of being and knowing within a backdrop of questionable energy production, unsafe agricultural practises and colonial settler reluctance to recognise Indigenous knowledges for maintaining a healthy environment. Dálkke is the Lule Sámi word for weather, and as Indigenous peoples we are weather watchers; peoples who know the seasons for sustainable life practises, people who know how to move, to hunt and harvest, and why and when the land needs to burn safely. The project is ongoing and will continue to re-search and collect stories to create a meta-story (Martin, 2008), reporting to the funding body (FORMAS) on Indigenous peoples' capacities to analyse and address the consequences as well as mitigate the impacts of anthropogenic climate change. These are the decolonising stories we need to hear.

Biography of presenting authors

May-Britt Öhman

May-Britt Öhman has a PhD in History of Technology and is a Lule/Forest Sámi from Lule River/Julevädno. For a decade, she has been active in various Sámi associations: board member of Silbonah Sámesijdda since 2011, board member of the Swedish National Sámi Association 2011–2015, and deputy member of the Sámi Parliament 2013–2017. Her research focus is on large technical systems, hydropower, water resources, energy production/consumption, mines, environment, risk and safety, decolonisation and healing from colonial traumas, Feminist Technoscience and Indigenous Methodologies/Theories. Geographical focus is on Sábmme and comparative studies with other Indigenous territories around the world.

Frances Wyld

Frances Wyld is a Martu woman (Aboriginal people of the Pilbara region of Australia), Doctor of Communication and lecturer at the University of South Australia. She teaches in the areas of Indigenous Knowledges, communication and cultural studies and has worked within curriculum development. Her research uses autoethnography, storytelling and mythography to center Indigenous Knowledges within an academic environment to establish an Indigenous worldview for ethical research and teaching. She has an ongoing collaboration with Sámi academics including a project led by Uppsala University to research climate change, Indigenous perspectives, and innovation. Her publications include both scholarly and creative writing elements.