



## Native American and Indigenous Studies Association

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#### Session Title

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Sámi perspectives on Climate Change, Green Colonialism, Forest Fires, Industrial Exploitations, and Food Sovereignty

#### Abstract

[Edit Abstract](#)

Addressing and analysing climate change leading to forest fires and burnt reindeer grazing lands in summer, as well as "locked in" reindeer food in winter, the whiteness and coloniality of "green" political campaigning, the consequences of industrial exploitations of Sámi territories – and the Sámi resistance and struggles to find solutions and challenge a colonial destructive knowledge paradigm - this panel is ultimately addressing Indigenous Food Sovereignty and thereby future survival for Indigenous peoples in general and Sámi in particular. Organised by a Sámi scholar at Uppsala University, the panel brings together community, scholars and non-Sámi/ non-Indigenous scholars from Sweden, Chile/UK, South Africa approaching the theme from multiple angles and aims at setting up a network for continued collaboration among ourselves and interested NAISA participants. The panel is partly financed by a research project led by Dr May-Britt Öhman on Indigenous Climate Change Studies (FORMAS 2019-2021), within the Swedish National Research Programme on Climate. Film and drone technology as a means for research, communication and dissemination is used. Case studies are from Jåhkåmåkke and Ljusdal on the Swedish side of Sábmme, and from the Talvivaara tin mine, Finland, where a tailing dam failure occurred in 2012-2013.

#### Keyword

[Edit Keyword](#)

Environment and ecology  
Science  
TEK/ Traditional ecological knowledge

#### Participants

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Sámi perspectives on climate change and imposed flexibility: experiences from reindeer herding in the Lule River valley

#### Title (Individual Paper)

Sámi perspectives on climate change and imposed flexibility: experiences from reindeer herding in the Lule River valley

[Edit Title](#)

#### Author

[Edit Author](#)

(Author) Gun Aira, annagun.aira@gmail.com; Sirges Sámi Village/Uppsala University

[Edit Abstract](#)

## Abstract

This is a presentation of a documentation project regarding climate changes – from our sijdda reindeer herding group, consisting of myself, my two children and a cousin's child. On the one hand, we document climate changes, and on the other hand we show how industrial exploitation and forestry impact on our ability to be “resilient”: an imposed flexibility.

We work and live along the Lule River, moving between winter and summer lands, stretching from the mountains in the west, to 100 km east of Jåhkåmåkke. Fifty years ago, the conditions were totally different from today. The reindeer were tamer and didn't fear humans. We worked on skis, humans and reindeer lived together under the same conditions. There were few forestry roads, and no snowmobiles with their tracks. Lichen on the trees was plentiful. The lichen on the ground was not destroyed by forestry machines. We rarely had to transport reindeer by trucks, and rarely had to support-feed them. The reindeer could support themselves most of the time.

Today, due to exploitation and climate changes combined, we have to support-feed the reindeer every year. Because of rapid temperature changes, snow falls, turns to water, and then freezes, “locking in” the ground lichen. The trees are also cut down, and so no tree lichen is available.

## Individual Presentation

### Individual Paper

Under the surface: Water, pollution, and threats against Sámi food security – the Talvivaara tailings dam failure

### Title (*Individual Paper*)

Under the surface: Water, pollution, and threats against Sámi food security – the Talvivaara tailings dam failure

[Edit Title](#)

### Author

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(**Author**) Eva Charlotta Helsdotter, eljt@kth.se; Uppsala University, Sweden

## Abstract

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Clean and safe water is the key to food security and food sovereignty. How can Sámi/Indigenous waters be protected from the destructive mining policies in the era of climate change mitigation and the scramble for metals needed for electrical cars, batteries, solar cells, and wind-power plants? How can awareness of the toxic pollution of tailings dams be raised among the public and decision-makers? This presentation is part of a film project about the Talvivaara tin mine in Finland, and the disastrous tailings dam failures in 2012-2013. A research group consisting of myself, May-Britt Öhman, and the independent filmmaker Storlöpare visited the site in 2017, conducting video interviews and documenting the area. The failure caused massive problems. Leakage from the tailings dam is still ongoing, polluting waters all the way to the city of Oulu, and into the Baltic Sea.

On the opposite side of the Baltic Sea, in Sweden, several mines are located in Sámi territories, and more mines are planned. In 2013, the Swedish government adopted a Mineral Strategy in which they claim to exploit mineral assets in a “long-term sustainable way, with consideration shown for ecological, social and cultural dimensions...”. Yet, respect for Sámi people is still lacking. The aim of the project is to reach a wider audience, and to support ongoing struggles to protect Sámi lands and waters. At NAISA, the ambition is to show an example of how to join film and scientific research, and to receive suggestions on how to proceed.

## Individual Presentation

## Individual Paper

## Fighting climate change and forest fires – from a Sámi perspective

**Title** (*Individual Paper*)

Fighting climate change and forest fires – from a Sámi perspective

[Edit Title](#)**Author**[Edit Author](#)**(Author)** Liz-Marie Nilsen, lizmarie.nilsen@gmail.com; Jåhkåmåkke/Uppsala University**(Author)** Ignacio Acosta, mail@ignacioacosta.com; University of Brighton, UK**Abstract**[Edit Abstract](#)

We present a research project documenting experiences from forest fires in two municipalities within Sámi territories.

The summer of 2018 was extremely hot and dry in Sweden, with up to 50 forest fires raging simultaneously. In Jåhkåmåkke – which has 5000 inhabitants, and an area of 19 477 km<sup>2</sup> – as many as four fires raged simultaneously during July. With the support of volunteers, and building on experiences from a major fire in 2006, disaster was avoided. In Ljusdal – which has 19000 inhabitants, and an area of 5288 km<sup>2</sup> – the fires spread out of control, and people had to be evacuated. Understanding what went well in Jåhkåmåkke and what went wrong in Ljusdal may provide lessons to be learned: it is not only about climate change, it is also about firefighting competence. Another aspect, highlighted from the Sámi perspective, concerns disaster relief: while forest owners resort to insurance, there is no such relief for reindeer herders, as they don't own the grazing lands. According to the Sámi Parliament's application for disaster relief to the Swedish government, 31 out of 51 Sámi reindeer herding villages and 21 500 hectare of grazing lands burned.

Due to climate change we can expect more of the same in the future. Thus the consequences of forest fires for reindeer grazing need to be addressed and mitigated, at the same time as it is of major importance to reclaim local and traditional knowledge on firefighting, demanding that the actors involved are prepared and ready when it happens again.

**Individual Presentation**

Individual Paper

## The whiteness of green ideology: Swedish environmentalism as colonial vanguard

**Title** (*Individual Paper*)

The whiteness of green ideology: Swedish environmentalism as colonial vanguard

[Edit Title](#)**Author**[Edit Author](#)**(Author)** Scott Burnett, auschi@gmail.com; Wits Centre for Diversity Studies**Abstract**[Edit Abstract](#)

The violent occupation and appropriation of land in Sápmi for Swedish hydro- and wind-power projects has been opposed by Sámi scholars and activists for over a century. Yet Sweden has maintained its reputation on the world stage both as a humanitarian and green “superpower”. The narrative of “good Sweden” has worked to (re)produce the nation as a space where whiteness is the unquestioned norm, and settler colonialism passes as common sense. Environmentalist communication in this context shapes ethical subjectivity, and legitimises the colonial base of the modern welfare state.

This paper presents a discourse-theoretical analysis of the construction of “renewable” energy around the 2018 elections. It investigates closely the Swedish Green Party's election platform at a national level, and also zooms in to Jåhkåmåkke municipality, and Sámi candidate Henrik Blind's successful campaign for office. While Sámi issues remain “unspeakable” at a national level, local political texts reveal complex accommodations and contestations. I argue that mainstream Swedish environmentalism constructs the argument for renewable energy as a series of impossible choices.

While this research has been pursued in conversation with Sámi scholars, I do not speak for or from a Sámi position. I am a descendant of the European settler colonialists of South Africa, and I have recently relocated to Sweden. My approach to critical “race” and indigenous studies research is to problematise the colonial centre and the “whiteness” it reproduces, in the tradition of critical whiteness and settler colonial studies.

**Individual Presentation**

## Individual Paper

**(Chair)** May-Britt Öhman, may-britt.ohman@cemfor.uu.se; Uppsala University and Luleå University of Technology

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