

De- or re-colonising climate adaptation? Indigenous and local knowledge in the climate adaptation machine

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The heterogenous objects that are referred to as “Indigenous knowledge” and “local knowledge” (Indigenous and Local Knowledge or ILK in IPCC’s lexicon) are receiving more and more recognition as “solutions providers” for the climate emergency. From their extensive presence in IPCC’s Assessment Reports, to the recent White House Indigenous Knowledge Guidance for Federal Agencies (White House 2022), the time seems to have come to support indigenous science. In the current wave of adaptation interventions, IKL is almost always invoked as key ingredient for fair and effective adaptation measures, as “unique information sources about past changes and potential solutions to present issues” (AR6 IPCC 2022). Indigenous groups and /or local communities are invoked as ‘natural’ stewards for fragile ecosystems, or as the implementers of low-impact, grassroots climate-resilient agriculture and conservation projects. These discourses are often portrayed as efforts towards a ‘decolonisation’ of climate imaginaries and adaptation practices.

However, under the weight of the epistemology structuring the production of knowledge on climate change and the related hegemony of the climate services paradigm, *other* forms of knowledge are routinely reduced to sources of data to be used, in isolation from the contexts in which they were produced, to fill gaps in scientific frameworks and models (Klenk et al 2017), or as repositories of replicable and scalable “solutions” (Petzold et al 2020; Latulippe and Klenk 2020).

We acknowledge the work of those analysing how/why indigeneity has been reduced to instrumental imaginaries of perseverance and resilience (Chandler & Reid 2020). The climate reductionism (Hulme 2011; Chakraborty & Sherpa 2021) informing frameworks and institutions operating within contemporary global adaptation regimes (Paprocki 2022) operate through the detachment of virtuous local practices and indigenous knowledge from situated struggles, power dynamics and from indigenous resistance. The shadow of climate reductionism hides the existence of conflicting interests and worldviews at multiple scales, obliterating non-compatible but situated forms of governance, values and laws, and visions of the future.

If the clash of epistemologies and the power relationships entailed in the hierarchy through which climate change knowledge is reproduced are not carefully scrutinised and acknowledged, then the climate adaptation machine becomes an enabler of novel forms of knowledge extractivism and is connivant with the hijacking and depoliticization of struggles that are then reabsorbed into global racial capitalism. For instance, seed sovereignty struggles risk being hijacked by the poverty/adaptation finance machine – e.g. with the adoption of specific seed included as condition for accessing a premium in weather index insurance schemes issued by global reinsurers and development agencies. In many cases in which ILK are intertwined with ‘smart’ approaches (Taylor & Bhasme 2020), the assumed “neutrality” of digital technologies (from mobile phones to satellites) further reinforces these processes and plays a central role in facilitating the collection, integration and use/exploitation of local/indigenous knowledge.

In this session, we welcome papers and reflections which might speak to themes and concepts such as (by no means limited to):

- Integration of knowledge systems in climate adaptation: problems, failures, ideas
- Data colonialism, Indigenous data sovereignty and Indigenous data governance protocols
- Intellectual property rights for IKL
- Datafication and Financialization of IKL
- Co-production of knowledge and consultative processes, including new methodological approaches
- Forms of resistance against hegemonic ‘climate adaptation regime’

If you would like to take part in this session, please send a proposed paper title and abstract (max. 250 words) to Giovanna Gioli (g.gioli@bathspa.ac.uk) and Giovanni Bettini (g.bettini@lancaster.ac.uk) by **February 26th**.



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