Ongoing dispersal shapes intercultural collaboration with women caring for sentient and gendered Country.

Women Caring for Country on the Frontier

Katherine van Wezel1,2

1Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC
2Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University

In the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, Waanyi and Garawa women have been at the forefront of establishing caring for Country programs on their lands. However, until recently they have seen relatively few employment opportunities to participate in these programs as rangers. This BNHCRC PhD project has provided an opportunity to work with the Waanyi-Garawa and Garawa rangers to support women in their struggle to care for Waanyi and Garawa Countries, and to develop a case study of intercultural collaboration within settler colonial Australia.

Introduction

Indigenous caring for Country programs are the leading employers of women within Australia’s environmental management sector. However, gender is still largely unconsidered in the planning and evaluation of intercultural caring for Country projects, and there is little critical consideration within settler policy discourse for the societal circumstances in which Indigenous women choose to participate in these partnerships. This research therefore explores the question: how does settler colonialism shape intercultural collaboration with women caring for Country in the Waanyi and Garawa case study?

Methods

This is a participatory action research project, where Waanyi and Garawa women participated in the research as rangers, and I participated in their ranger programs as a research student based out of Robinson River community and Barrolloa from 2015-2018. I have reflexively analyzed this experience, as well as unstructured interviews and group discussions, within a critical theoretical framework drawing on settler colonial and feminist studies. Under the guidance of women I have worked with, my thesis is narrated explicitly from my own perspective as a white woman, already implicated in both settler institutions and non-Indigenous peoples’ decolonizing experiments. The number of Indigenous women employed in caring for Country programs and working in partnership with settler institutions is in Australia is steadily growing. This case study provides insights into impediments and opportunities for decolonizing these intercultural collaborations.

Discussion

Recent BNHCRC funded research that it is useful to consider collaborations between settler institutions and Indigenous peoples as decolonizing experiments. The number of Indigenous women employed in caring for Country programs and working in partnership with settler institutions is in Australia is steadily growing. This case study provides insights into impediments and opportunities for decolonizing these intercultural collaborations.


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For more information, please email katherinpetria.vanwezel@cdu.edu.au

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