

# The Spectrum of Intersectionality in the Arctic

## *From Discrimination to Diversity and Inclusion*

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This first special issue of 2023 began with a call for papers that highlighted a key facet of the population often overlooked by outsiders to the Arctic—despite its relatively sparse overall numbers and low population density, the region is full of human diversity. This diversity exists within the inhabitants, both Indigenous and (im)migrant (whether temporary or permanent), rural and urban, and by sexual orientation, gender roles, class, and ethnicity, on multiple parameters. For this issue, we go beyond the borders of Siberia to examine some of those key factors and their impacts on the lives of neighboring circumpolar peoples in North America, Greenland, and Scandinavia as well, in order to better understand commonalities as well as divergences in the experiences of those living in northern regions.

The guest editors (Abdel-Fattah, Friedrich, Lee, and Nikolaeva) sought to solicit work that attends to one or more of those intersectional factors in any part of the Arctic and draws attention to the ways diversity is made invisible or erased both interpersonally and governmentally. The editors received a wealth of submissions from multiple fields; here, we present a selection of those pieces in both traditional research article format as well as shorter reports or essays (often accompanied by photography) that capture some of the dimensions of diversity in the northern circumpolar world.

Doris Friedrich's piece on intersectionality and climate justice begins the issue, with its rich overview of the issue and call to consider the ethical dimensions of climate change. An intersectional approach, Friedrich argues, is essential to understanding the impacts of changing climate across the world, and here she highlights how gender and Indigeneity are factors in understanding those impacts in a variety of



northern contexts. Oftentimes both women's and Indigenous people's knowledges and experiences are erased from high-level discussions and debates despite their absolute relevance in the day-to-day lives of northerners. Friedrich argues that paying greater attention to how climate issues intersect with other social concerns allows for all issues to be addressed in a much fuller and more nuanced (and effective) fashion.

It is critical, too, to remember that the diversity of the Arctic exists not only in its permanent population, but also in those who conduct research in the region. The paper by Joanna Young, Sarah Clement, and Erin Pettit addresses the ways that women and non-binary individuals are underrepresented in many of the sciences, and how this marginalization increases for BIPOC people as well. They discuss the efforts of Inspiring Girls\* Expeditions (the asterisk here denoting an expansive approach to gender) in the Northern US as an intervention to include more young people aged 16–18 from these groups in spaces where they can be exposed to a wide variety of scientific and outdoor experiences. Their case study traces the development of the program and provides key advice regarding how scientists in the (sub)Arctic can work towards greater inclusion of marginalized groups within their research fields.

We then move to Greenland with a look at how literature by outsiders has depicted Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, with a close look at Rockwell Kent's travel memoir *Salamina* (1935). Authors Susan Vanek and Jette Rygaard present its historical context and discuss Kent's depictions of Greenlandic Inuit women and sexuality, and how they reinforced racialized and gendered power hierarchies within society at the time. Their analysis also reveals how the ripples of such portrayals persist today in discussions of Arctic Indigenous societies and their inhabitants by outside researchers. They call for reflection on these historic works and their impact—as well as our researcher positionalities—so they are not replicated, even inadvertently, in the present.

Siff Lund Kjærgaard's piece continues the Greenlandic focus, providing a close look at gender equality over time through the lens of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Kjærgaard's thorough yet concise analysis gives us a glimpse of some of the gaps that remain even if, at first glance, it appears that gender equality exists. A key factor emerges in the conclusion: the majority of women in Greenland are also Indigenous, and also live in rural

spaces, and yet these intersections of gender, Indigeneity, and rurality/urbanity are not always adequately addressed.

Maria Pavlova and Nyurgun Leontiev then take us back to Siberia, to Evenki communities in the southern area of the Sakha Republic, to examine the role of women in the Ethnological Impact Assessment processes, which occur when extractive industries seek to expand into areas where Indigenous minorities live. Despite their lived experiences, involvement, and concern, women's perspectives are not always taken into consideration when impacts are being considered. Assumptions about gender roles—both by those within the community as well as by industry outsiders—mean that women have much less clout in these assessment hearings. As in Kjærgaard's piece, we can see how the positions of gender and Indigeneity are amplified and lead to many women's voices going unheard by institutional powers.

We move then into a series of essays and reports, also from the Sakha Republic, as the Indigenous Women's Collectives of the Olenek Evenki National District and Sardana Nikolaeva present some of the ways that women's Indigenous grassroots activism is happening in communities in another part of the region. This piece, illustrated with numerous photos of the collectives, focuses on the agency of Indigenous women, discussing the ways that women's activism has diverse and distinctive forms and has persisted for many years in both the cultural and political spheres of these communities.

Itzel Zagal and Christina Edwin's piece also highlights cultural resistance as well as solidarity. Their essay describes the ways that Indigenous Mexican practices like *Día de Muertos* are celebrated by the transnational diaspora in Alaska, and also create a cultural bridge between Indigenous peoples in the north and further south. Focusing on the creation of an altar for the Indigenous (Ahtna Dene) matriarch Olga Ezi, they reveal the common reverence and respect for ancestors that resonates among Indigenous cultures from both locations.

Finally, Jean Balestrery's experimental essay places a spotlight on two different photo projects/exhibitions—one based in Alaska and one in Scandinavia—that reveal intersections of gender, sexuality, and Indigeneity among Alaska Native individuals and Sámi individuals, respectively. The parallel arrangement of the text and quotes highlight the striking similarities, both historically and at present, between the experiences of the 2SLGBTQ+ communities depicted in these projects.

Diverse in both format and theme, all of these articles and essays contribute to critiques of the ways in which certain voices may be

neglected or ignored in discussions and debates held by higher-level political actors or by researchers outside the region, while also revealing the agency of both individuals and groups participating in the social and political life in these northern spaces. While not an exhaustive look into all possible prisms of diversity we find in the northern circumpolar world, they highlight several prescient issues that should be further considered by all researchers working in Siberia, as well as the rest of the Arctic.