

Transcript

The view from Brisbane, Australia and Santiago, Chile

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

TRACEY BUNDA: Because we actually haven't acted in a very human way for a very long time. I'm Tracy Bunda, and I am a Ngugi Wakka Wakka woman. The Ngugi component of my identification follows my mother's line and the Wakka Wakka follows my patrilineal lines. It's really important for us as Aboriginal people within Australia to be able to identify ourselves in that way.

And professionally, I am a professor and I work within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies and education at the University of Queensland.

When you think of Australia, you're most probably thinking of the conventional map divided up into six states and two territories. But there is another way to be able to understand Australia. When you look at the Aboriginal map from our Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, you go, whoa, you see hundreds of Aboriginal countries.

It instantly gives you a different understanding of this landmass that is known as Australia. And it shows you the multitude of Indigenous groups. It's mind-blowing. One of the other things that you may not know about Indigenous people is that we are named as the oldest living culture in the world.

When Aboriginal people speak of country, we are talking about that tract of land that we inextricably have a connection to. And we have that connection as a result of birthright. So, it's not just only associated with the geographical place, it's also a sense of identification and belonging with everything within that physical space as well. Not only the land, but the animals, the skies, and the stars.

By that association, we have a sense of belonging to all Aboriginal people within that country, and we take on all of the responsibilities as well to be able to maintain that country. Country is your identity.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

HUGO ROMERO: Well, I am Hugo Romero, Ugo Romero in Spanish. I am professor in the University of Chile. I live and work in Santiago de Chile, which is the capital of the country. In Chile, the Indigenous population is approximately 10% of the national population. This country is one of the longest countries in the world. We have 4,200 kilometres from North to South, which is more than crossing the whole Europe.

And as a consequence of this geographical different locations, we have different people also living mainly in the mountains. And, of course, the main difference with the white population is that they are still keeping most of their culture, still using their own language. So, it means that their culture and system of knowledge is quite different in climatic terms. There is no separation between humanity and nature of social life and natural life. Everything is integrated.

Climate has not only a physical meaning, but a religious meaning, which is conditioning in some way, the social behaviour and the attitude of the people. Climate is the third most important god in the traditional system. The first is Viracocha, which is the big creator of the world. Now, the second is, of course, water puri in the attempts and the third is climate, it was called Illapa.

By Inca imperio, it's difficult in our case to understand this sort of philosophy where the components and the interaction between nature and society are defined in a quite different way to our western science. They are much more adapted to climatic variations, fluctuations, and natural landscapes than the people who are living in the cities.

So, if they had been able to live in this landscape for 11,000 or 12,000 years, it means that they have suffered and they have lived very different climates. For most of them, the main issue is not necessarily climatic chamber itself, but it's the love of resilience to climatic change of variability because other intervention in their territory for lithium mining. Mining is taking away the water.

Most of the use of lithium is concentrated in electromobility and all the estimation about the substitution of oil by electricity is very important. Probably at the end of this decade, we are having millions of electric cars in the world. For the Global North, this is fundamental. I believe that the geography of the climatic change is quite different in the north and in the south.

For us in this Global South, it's really an electromobility or carbon neutrality real priority or probably more important that this is poverty or it is other social needs, which are much more important.

Atacama is a main desert in South America. Generally speaking, it's one of the driest places in the world. Lithium is a salt concentration, which is incorporated in brine and brine is water. We are mining water in the driest desert in the world. They take the brine and they put a swimming pool and then they evaporate the water. The water is lost in the atmosphere.

To produce one ton of lithium, you need two million litres of water and we are producing 200,000 tons, and we are expecting to produce the double figure in the next years. And then the impact of this intervention on the nature and on the society is quite high very important. It's a complete destruction to say clearly where we are observing and for what? For the target of the Global North. It is a geographical paradox.

TRACEY BUNDA: One of the things that I teach non-Indigenous people all the time is those extraction relationships have to stop. We cannot continue to use the land as if it is an object. And I hear I'm going to include the sea, as well as the air. It's not an object. It's not a thing to be conquered, to be controlled, to be cut up, to be available for a few. We have to do much better in terms of turning those extraction relationships around.

And here is an intersection of where white science and Aboriginal knowledge clash and it becomes quite problematic. Distinct separations between this is the animal world, this is the plant world, this is the human world and a lot of that really has been influenced by the way in which science has constructed knowledge and we need to unpack that.

So, this country isn't made up of one knowledge system, it's not made up of white people's knowledge. Our knowledge has lived here since the beginning of time. There are two knowledge systems and one has always tried to dominate the other. But it's that Indigenous knowledge system which needs to be able to come to the fore to be able to work out some of the answers for some of the challenges that we are faced with.

One of the things that the modern world has done is it's distanced us from country and here, I'm using country within an Aboriginal sense. See the modern world says, have you got all your viewing platforms tick? Have you got your holiday; your international holiday set up tick? This is a different value system and it distance us from having that relationship with country, with the tract of land.

Our association with our country, it's what makes us human, and we are facing a climate crisis and challenge because we actually haven't acted in a very human way for a very long time.

HUGO ROMERO: This knowledge of our Indigenous people is an understanding of climate in a quite different way. We have to learn a lot from our native people and mainly the ethical value of their situation.

TRACEY BUNDA: We have to have a different type of relationship with the country to be more human, to bring our humanness to the fore for each other and for the land.

[MUSIC PLAYING]