

Abstract

This thesis explores the discursive practices of the Gwich'in tribe in Alaska, specifically in the context of the environmental conflict over the proposed oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, an area they have inhabited for generations. Over the years, the tribe has been actively engaged in political activism to protect the Refuge from oil development, with a specific focus on safeguarding the Porcupine Caribou herd that inhabits the area. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of political ecology, the thesis posits that the core of this conflict lies in differing ontologies of nature rather than divergent interests. To address this research problem, the thesis investigates the discursive strategies employed by the Gwich'in and their evolution, utilizing critical discourse analysis guided by Van Dijk's sociocognitive approach. By analyzing testimonies given by Gwich'in speakers before the US Congress between 2003 and 2019, the research identifies four key discursive strategies utilized by the Gwich'in. The empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that ontological differences underpin the tribe's discursive repertoire. Through an exploration of the Gwich'in tribe's discursive practices, the thesis seeks to gain deeper insights into how their discursive practices contribute to their relative success in resisting development in the refuge. The findings highlight the critical role of discursive practices in environmental and social mobilization efforts, offering valuable insights into the intricate interplay between diverse perceptions and practices concerning nature and their influence on socio-environmental conflicts.