

Book of Abstracts

Symposium

Pastoralism in Transition: Exploring intersections of religious and environmental changes

6-8 November, 2024

ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa
Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa
Museu de Lisboa



Exploring religious
and environmental
changes in drylands



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia

cei_iscte

Centro de Estudos
Internacionais



November 6, 2024

Keynote talk

The Present and the Future in the Present: Religion, Values, and Climate Change

Joel Robbins

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK

jr626@cam.ac.uk

Many people have come to the conclusion that simply sharing the scientific data on global warming with the public has not been enough to motivate the kind of consistent action that would be needed to successfully address the threat it presents. In this lecture I consider whether religion might have some unique role to play in bringing such action about. At the core of my argument are the claims that religions often transform everyday understandings of temporality and that notions of temporality in turn profoundly shape the way people approach realizing the values they hold, including those related to climate change. In light of these claims, I suggest that religion can play a role in fostering climate action that many other institutions have not been able to play successfully. Throughout the lecture, I draw on work in the anthropology of religion and time, on the one hand, and in the philosophy of values, on the other, to build my argument.

Session 1. Pastoralism and religion around the world

Chair: Troy Sternberg, Center for International Studies (CEI), ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa & University of Oxford

Raika Religion, the Environment and Planetary Boundaries

Ilse Köhler-Rollefson

League for Pastoral Peoples

ilse@pastoralpeoples.org

The Raika are a major group of Hindu pastoralists in Rajasthan (India), that herd a variety of animals, including camels, sheep, goats, cattle, and buffaloes. They are most closely associated with camels and believed that it was their divine duty bestowed upon them by God Shiva to take care of and ensure the well-being of camels. While they identify as Hindus, they pray and ask help from hero-gods, such as Pabuji and Mammaji, who became famous as protectors of cows. Until the end of the 20th century, the Raika subscribed to a set of 7 moral beliefs/rules which included not to build permanent houses, not to sell female animals and milk, nor to slaughter/eat meat of any animals. Community members who did not adhere to these rules were routinely outcasted. However, as pasture areas constricted, demand for camels bottomed out, and modern education became ubiquitous, this value system changed dramatically, although remnants still linger. This paper will describe these changes, the current status quo, and analyse its implications for the sustainable use of the earth's resources and remaining with 'Planetary Boundaries'.

Buddhism, socialism, and capitalism - A comparison of airag production in modern Mongolian and Inner Mongolian pastoral societies

Takahiro Ozaki¹ & Yuki Morinaga²

¹ Kagoshima University, Japan

ozakit@leh.kagoshima-u.ac.jp

² Meiji University, Japan

ykmorinaga@gmail.com

This presentation aims to explore the relationship between Mongolian pastoralists' changing sense of value and modes of *airag* (fermented mare's milk) production in modern history. According to our survey in 2010s, length of production period and amount of *airag* is diverse from county to county in Mongolia. It is noteworthy that counties which hold large amounts of horses are not necessarily eager to produce *airag*. For example, southeastern Mongolia seldom produces *airag*, although this area is traditionally famous for horse production. In contrast, Northern central Mongolia traditionally produces a lot of *airag* for a longer period in a year. This tradition can trace back to socialist era, when cooperatives in the area were assigned to produce *airag*. Such a diversity also exists in Inner Mongolia. One of the areas which are famous for *airag* production is Abaga region, adjacent to above-mentioned southeastern Mongolia. Historically, there was a large monastery which were reported to serve large amounts of *airag* in a Buddhist service. There remains a special skill of milking mares which enables pastoralists to milk them efficiently. After 2010s, sale of *airag* became popular in this area and many pastoral laborers who come from Mongolia are hired to produce it. Now we can find a sharp contrast of milking skill between local pastoralists and laborers from Mongolia, who stick to their own skills. Today, Inner Mongolian pastoralists are producing *airag* in more capitalistic way, pursuing profit by selling them. On the other hand, Mongolian pastoralists regard pastoral skills in Socialist era as scientifically correct, so they are reluctant to change their traditional ways. In conclusion, although socialism and capitalism will not be regarded as religion in a narrower sense, we can think that they also act like religion as they affect local people's sense of value and decision making.

Impact of different islamic practices and islamist groups on Tuareg mobile pastoralists in Niger

Sarah Lunaček

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

sarahlunacek@gmail.com

Islam in Tuareg society in today's Niger was a responsibility of specialised groups of *ineslemen*, while other groups received sporadic Islamic teaching. A Sufi oriented version of Islam was prevalent and included pilgrimages to sacred spaces related to ancestors. Islamic practices in Air massif were communicating with cosmology of shelter and appropriation of surrounding wilderness (Claudot-Hawad), including djinns and certain healing practices. Networks of Islamic brotherhoods were used as channels of connectivity across the Sahara (Schelee) and sometimes became source of political rivalry (Keenan) and alliances. Salafist Islam spreading in last two decades from the south (Nigeria) and jihadist groups spreading in Sahel, seem alien to previous practices related to Islam.

Tuareg society in the north of Niger is transforming regrading varied factors and challenges. Drylands environment is getting harsher with extreme climate events and mobility to pastures is harder to

achieve due to land appropriation for agriculture and mining. Mobile pastoralists facing jihadist groups are forced to negotiate with them, to get access to pasture lands and to sustain mobility. Jihadist groups use control of territory to extract benefits from movements and resources of different kind. Furthermore, in territories controlled by jihadist groups, cultural practices are forcefully transformed, including religious and ritual singing, healing and autonomy of women. On the other hand, moderate new Islamic organisations are calling assemblies for peace and trying to keep out jihadism and protect their youth from temptation to join in lack of other possibilities. In the presentation based on observation regarding changes of Tuareg society in relation to land use, development and mobility and on literature about impact of religion in the past and present, I will try to outline some research question relevant for Tuareg mobile pastoralism and its relation to environment regarding religious change.

“Weather is in God’s hands!” How religious beliefs and practices shape landscape management in Romanian mountain pastoralism

Ioana Baskerville

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi & Department of Ethnology, Alexandru Philippide Institute of Romanian Philology, Romanian Academy – Iasi Branch, Romania

ioana.baskerville@acadiasi.ro

Up-to-date comprehensive research on how religious beliefs and practices of Romanian mountain shepherding communities influence their stewardship of landscape, use of natural resources, as well as their capacity to adapt to climate change is currently scarce. This presentation will thus offer a critical synthetical view on recent anthropological fieldwork revealing the internal dynamics of the spiritual life of some shepherding communities performing long distance transhumance in the Romanian Carpathians. The contemporary framework will be compared to existing ethnographic data on the topic collected within Romanian ethnology in the last decades.

Carpathian pastoralism is an ecologically sustainable system of grazing based on seasonal mobility between high alpine pasture in the summer and lowlands during winter season. The long-term reclusion especially during the 3-month summer grazing, and the special conditions of managing a complex human-animal-nature connection informed a powerful dependency of transhumant shepherds to conservative religious practices. The aim of this presentation is to provide an interpretation on the role of spirituality in the shepherds’ strategy of adapting their work to unprecedented environmental conditions and other ecosystem disruptions (such as growing numbers of wild predators ‘attacks, unavailability of traditional grazing areas, biodiversity loss, etc.) which recently affect both their livelihoods and professional practices. Climate change affects the old pastoral calendar, the timing of herds climbing to the alpine pastures and the entire ecological knowledge of shepherds used to manage their livestock activity through a time-tested interpretation and recurrent decisions based on the “reading the signs of nature” (folk cosmology, folk astronomy, weather divination, household magic, defensive and offensive magic).

As elsewhere in the global pastoral system, unpredictable weather regimen is more and more hindering not just the pastoral activity in the Romanian Carpathians as an economic activity, but also the mountain shepherds’ spiritual behavioral routine, and encourages magical responses to extraordinary environmental circumstances menacing their existential security and their conservative

cultural and economic system. But these various observed changes act either as incentive for economic modernization, innovation of the pastoral productive system accompanied by secularization of their everyday culture or, on the opposite, a more intense drive towards securing spiritual protection and magical solutions to cope with these disturbances.

The presentation will briefly explain the connection between the shepherds' religious practices and the larger religious landscape of Romanian society which features polarization between institutional secularization and increased individual recourse to traditional religiosity. The specific agency of religious actors within shepherding communities, representing either the formal, established religion (the Church) or the informal practitioners of traditional religiosities will also be analyzed. The sporadic, but growing conversion of Romanian mountain shepherds to neo-protestant cults and how this religious framework changes traditional spiritual practices will be approached.

Green investments: climate change mitigation and its implications in northern Kenya

Annemiek Pas Schrijver

Sociology of Development and Change Group, Wageningen University, The Netherlands

annemiek.schrijver@wur.nl

Climate change and biodiversity loss are increasingly presented as an interconnected environmental crisis in need of global scaling up and investments for its mitigation. While the urgency is based on ecological evidence and receives state, corporate and civil society support, the rolling out of green investments at the local level can be highly problematic. Green initiatives tend to be implemented in already economically and politically marginalized regions and reproduce existing social and environmental injustices through dynamics of appropriation, conflict and dispossession. This presentation uses a case study to provide insights into emerging conflict dynamics over land-based resources in the wake of 'modern' green investments in northern Kenya.

Session 2. Oreteti: Connecting Humans to God

A short documentary by **Lorenzo d'Angelo** (2019), followed by a conversation with Kenyan pastoralists **Lenaai ole Mowuo**, **Stanley ole Neboo**, **Richard ole Supeet**, and **Angela Kronenburg García**.

This film explores the difficulties faced by a Maasai agropastoral community in Tanzania, as a time of climate crisis stimulates cultural and economic changes. Through the voice of Philipo, a young Maasai man, it describes the importance of a rain-making ritual. At the centre of this ritual is a plant that is sacred to the Maasai, the Oreteti. This is not a common plant in the semi-arid regions of East Africa. Often, it is found near water sources-particularly valuable for agropastoral communities, especially during drought. For this reason, the Oreteti is associated with the possibility of overcoming difficulties in times of crisis, as well as with fertility and women. It is no coincidence that women play a fundamental role in the rain-making ritual; without their presence and their prayers, it would lose its meaning. The film bears witnesses to a crucial change in Philipo's community, a change that also affects the meaning and indeed the existence of the rain-making ritual. Much of Maasai cultural life revolves around pastoral rites and symbols. Indeed, the Maasai consider and define themselves as "people-of-the-cattle", although, over several generations, they have increasingly added activities such as agriculture to their livestock keeping in response to shifting economic and political circumstances. In

Philipo's village, the arrival of the Lutheran Church and successive famines and droughts have accelerated processes of change. As Philipo himself points out, all of this, in turn, has had palpable effects on economic decisions and cultural choices as well as on gender relation. Ultimately, this changes the meaning of the Oreteti ritual itself. In conclusion, we are presented with a reflection by a young Maasai on how his community can overcome current difficulties, given that connections between humans, and between the human and the divine, have been exposed to new meaning.

Session 3. Key themes: Changing Lands, Changing Religions

Mystical Natures Project: an overview

Joana Roque de Pinho

Center for International Studies (CEI), ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal
myna2024@mail.com

Pastoral Transformations in African Drylands

Kathleen A. Galvin

Anthropology Department & The Africa Center, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, USA
Kathleen.Galvin@colostate.edu

For centuries, African pastoralists have adapted to climate, social, political, and ecological processes. They have adapted to political, societal, or environmental changes by migrating, cooperating with other ethnic groups, or taking up agriculture, among many other activities. They are still adapting. Flexibility is embedded in pastoral management strategies and institutionalized in social capital. However, climate change and socio-economic drivers rapidly alter some of these systems, potentially increasing vulnerability. Management is becoming increasingly sensitive to anthropogenic disturbances from direct and indirect actions, compounded by climatic perturbations, contributing to habitat decline and fragmentation.

Pastoralists observe and report these changes and their impacts on the environment and livelihood strategies. Livelihood strategies are modified to address these impacts. The changes, impacts, and responses are contingent on site- and individual-level factors. Site-level factors include community histories, local cultures, values, worldviews, and religion, which can lead to the same events being interpreted differently. At the individual level, demographic characteristics (e.g., age) and livelihood activities affect climate change impacts, for example.

Changes in local climate and human activity are reshaping historically reliable landscapes. Simply put, the region's rangeland ecosystems are under increasing strain from various directions and undergoing significant transformation in many areas. Pastoral livelihoods are also in a state of transformation, with many households and communities engaging in higher-than-normal levels of migration, increasing economic diversification, and, as part of this latter shift, the growing economic role of women at various scales. These changes and transformations are the subject of this brief presentation.

Changes in Mongolian pastoralism

Batbuyan Batjav¹ & Troy Sternberg²

¹Center for Nomadic Pastoralism Studies, Mongolia

b_batbuyan@yahoo.com

²Center for International Studies (CEI), ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal & University of Oxford, UK

tsgyr@iscte-iul.pt

Relationships between religious changes and environmental changes in drylands: A systematic review of qualitative research

Megan Wainwright¹ & Joana Roque de Pinho² (Presenting Authors)

¹University of Durham, UK

megan@meganwainwright.ca

²CEI, ISCTE-IUL, Portugal

myna2024@gmail.com

Joana Roque de Pinho, Megan Wainwright, Amadu Djaló, Troy Sternberg & Zaira Tas Kronenburg (Systematic Review Authors)

Drylands share a unique set of characteristics as well as challenges. Environmental changes in these areas are numerous, including increasingly severe climatic events, changes in land use, and conflicting demands for access to natural resources. In parallel, the societies living in drylands are experiencing changes in religion and religiosity, such as conversion to new faiths and spiritual revival. The MYNA project set-out to explore the relationships between these changes as they interact in peoples' everyday lives. As a foundation to the project, we carried out a systematic review of the literature on the relationship(s) between religious change(s) and environmental change(s) in drylands globally. Following an initial scoping phase, we systematically searched four databases (Scopus, GreenFILE, Google Scholar Publish or Perish, and the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)) using an extensive combination of search terms. We also identified literature through authors' personal libraries, journal searches and organisational websites (grey literature). 2601 records were screened in the Rayyan platform for inclusion or exclusion based on title and abstract. 116 records went on to full-text screening. To be included in the review, studies needed to have used qualitative data collection methods to explore both religious change and environment change in a dryland country or region. 24 studies met our inclusion criteria. We critically appraised the methodological strengths and weaknesses of each of the 24 studies, extracted characteristics of each study, and extracted findings that related to the relationship(s) between environmental change(s) and religious change(s) using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. We are currently in the phase of analyzing and synthesizing findings across studies to demonstrate the state of our knowledge on this topic and contribute new insights to the field. In this presentation we will give an overview of the body of research on this topic, including where and with whom such research is being undertaken and the relationships explored. We will also share what we have learned from the review so far that can be applied to improving the conduct and reporting of research on this important topic.

November 7, 2024

Session 4. Mongolian pastoralism & religion

Chair: Sarah Lunaček, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

On aridity: perspectives on dryness from central Mongolia

Joseph Bristley¹ & Gerelsuren Ganbold²

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK

jb2329@cam.ac.uk

² Corresponding Researcher, International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations under the auspices of UNESCO

gesumanager9@gmail.com

From the southern Gobi to Mongolia's dry north-western regions, much of Mongolia's landscape is typified by its aridity. This can be understood as a state of significant dryness, where water sufficient for the sustenance of human and animal life is precarious or exists in short supply. In this presentation, however, we explore 'aridity' less as a description of physical environments typified by a relative lack of water (although this is indeed the case). Instead, we see it as a relational property emergent from heterogeneous engagements between humans and non-human others. Exploring fractious encounters between livestock herders, capricious spirits, and recalcitrant infrastructures, we examine how various perspectives on aridity – ranging from newly desiccated grasslands to broken wells – are articulated in local social life.

Experiencing Environmental Changes in Inner Mongolia (China): Pastoral Knowledge and Ritual Adaptation among the Pastoralists of Hulun Buir

Aurore Dumont

Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris, France

auroredumont@gmail.com

Over the last few years, the pastoralists of Hulun Buir, a vast pastoral area situated in Inner Mongolia, China, have experienced important environmental changes which resulted in climate instability and severe droughts. In turn, these changes have had a significant impact on people's pastoral and religious activities, notably rituals dedicated to *oboo* cairns. During *oboo* worship, the reciprocal exchange between pastoralists and their natural environment is supposed to symbolically ensure the fertility of the herds, green pastures and abundant rain. However, the growth of the mining industry, the degradation of pasturelands, pollution and droughts have brought about a new discourse and caused local populations to adapt their *oboo* rituals. What do *oboo* rituals ultimately tell us about pastoral practices and environmental issues in contemporary Inner Mongolia? Based on data collected among the pastoralists of Hulun Buir between 2011 and 2024, this presentation will explore how and why *oboo* local rituals lie at the intersection of pastoral knowledge, spirituality and adaptation to climate change

Digging into Enchanted Landscapes

Maria-Katharina (Nina) Lang

Institute for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria

Maria-Katharina.Lang@oeaw.ac.at

Digging or touching the ground in Mongolia is practised on various layers and changes the Mongolian landscape; sometimes it is connected to environmental damage and natural disaster. Due to the traditional belief in the Mother Earth and local spirits, digging the soil is reluctant as piercing the entrails of the Earth (*gazriin hevlii*) and angering the spirits. Mobile pastoralists move within the landscape with their animals, taking care to avoid angering the spirits or owners of the land (*Ius savdag*). The technique of digging is a socially constructed action and involves not only handling with the earth but also communicating with various involved materialities, human and non-human beings and requires various actions and/or rituals. In a new project we are investigating the reactions to intruding into the Mongolian Earth from different perspectives. In this presentation I will present examples from previous and recent ethnographic field research in Central Mongolia, addressing questions such as: “How is the intrusion into the ground perceived for different purposes such as resource extraction or the excavation of artefacts? Are there differences and what reactions are evoked?” Digging in any form not only transforms the landscape, but also has an impact on the lives of mobile herders and spirits.

Buddhist Ritual of Removing the Seal of Land-Spirits: Benevolent or Malevolent for the Environment?

Lhagvademchig Jadamba

Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, National University of Mongolia, Mongolia & CEI, ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal

lhagvademchigj@gmail.com

In contemporary Mongolia, religious engagement in socio-political issues, including environmental issues, unfolds in subtle yet symbolically visible ways. This presentation will explore the increasing popularity of the Buddhist ritual known as the “removal of the seal of the land-spirits” (*lüsün tamga arilgah*). What is the seal of land-spirits or landowners? The seal, or stamp, is a metaphysical mark believed to be placed on individuals by land-spirits offended by human actions such as earth excavation or water pollution. Those marked by this seal are thought to encounter misfortunes such as physical or mental illnesses, accidents, and other adverse consequences inflicted by these land-spirits. This marking is not limited to those directly responsible for environmentally harmful actions but can extend to individuals using products—such as automobiles or electronic devices that are made from destructive resource extraction. In this way, almost anyone can bear the seal of land-owner spirits. The ritual of *lüsün tamga arilgah* offers spiritual protection by symbolically removing the seal from those attending the ceremony. It raises the intriguing question: Are Buddhist monks, through this ritual, aligning themselves with the land spirits or with the people? In other words, are they serving the interests of the spirits, who have been harmed by humans, or the people, who seek protection from the spirits’ wrath? Or perhaps, do they act as mediators between spirits and the people, serving for the benefit of both?

Session 5. *Mystical Natures* project - Findings

Chair: Kathleen A. Galvin, Colorado State University, USA

Encountering spirituality through a Gobi dryland transect

Troy Sternberg^{1,4}, Joana Roque de Pinho² & Batbuyan Batjav³

^{1, 2} Center for International Studies (CEI), ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal
tsgyr@iscte-iul.pt; myna2024@mail.com

³ Center for Nomadic Pastoralism Studies, Mongolia
b_batbuyan@yahoo.com

⁴ School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, UK

Since the end of communism in the 1990s a vibrant spiritual marketplace has flourished in Mongolia. Two strands of past religiosity have re-emerged – Buddhism and shamanism. Nation-building, cultural heritage and nomadic traditions have contributed to growing spirituality from the enforced atheism of the previous century. This may reflect ‘a national religion of shamanism versus world religions’ (Bumochir 2014, p 473) or Campi’s (2022, p 1) identification of ‘government-sponsored grand Buddhist-related rituals and practices, which are symbols of national identity’. We set out to track spirituality through a religious and environmental transect across the country’s steppe and desert landscape. The aim was to move beyond concepts commonly centred in the capital Ulaan Baatar to experience living manifestations. Monks, shamans, *ovoo*, monasteries and offerings to local spirits were encountered in a tolerant, accepting spiritual presence. An ongoing lively debate emerged as Mongolia embraced spiritual and ecological imaginings suited to the dryland steppe.

Pastoralism and Pentecostalism: Private land/sacred land in the Amboseli Ecosystem, southern Kenya

Joana Roque de Pinho¹, Stanley ole Neboo², Richard ole Supeet³ & Angela Kronenburg García⁴

¹ Center for International Studies (CEI), ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal
myna2024@gmail.com

² Talek River Water Conservation Association (Talek WRUA), Talek, Narok County, Kenya
skneboo@gmail.com

³ Imbirikani, Loitokitok, Kajiado County, Kenya
richard.solonka@gmail.com

⁴ The Earth and Life Institute, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium
angela.kronenburg@uclouvain.be

Bialecki et al. (2008) once questioned anthropologists’ reluctant engagement with Christianity. Recently, Wilkins (2021) pondered the absence of religious actors in political ecological inquiry. We address these concerns by tackling another omission, i.e., how scholarship on livelihoods and environmental change among some East African (agro)pastoralists overlooks their recent, rapid conversion to Pentecostalism. Despite other disciplines’ acknowledgement of spiritual dimensions in human-environmental relationships, and accounts of early Maasai encounters with mainline Protestant and Catholic missionaries (Hodgson, 2005; Rigby, 1981), contemporary analyses of Maasai livelihoods and environments sidestep Pentecostalism as a variable in changing livelihoods/land uses,

responses to climatic instability, conservation outcomes and relationships to the land (e.g., Homewood et al., 2009; but see Roque de Pinho et al.; 2014, Baird, 2015) – even when confronted with conspicuous faith-related manifestations, such as proliferating Kenyan and transnational churches and lively public religious performances.

We analyze long-term ethnographic data (2002-04, 2011, 2002-23) from two southern Kenyan conservation landscapes and examine entanglements of Pentecostalism with land use/tenure changes and climate change. We find that Christian beliefs, church leaders' discourses and behaviors, and Bible-inspired household dynamics re-shape how (agro)pastoralists relate to the land, conceptually and materially. Around Amboseli National Park, churches' promotion of farming interacts with conservation discourse to redefine the very meaning of "land". Around Maasai Mara National Reserve, land demarcation and privatization has facilitated the penetration of churches through land purchases and donations. With declining reciprocity ascribed to land privatization and fencing, urbanization and education, churches are credited with re-creating "unity" and "respect" among community members. Meanwhile, pastors preach against land sales, arbitrate land conflicts, promote wildlife conservation and tree planting, and lead climate change mitigation efforts. Away from clear directions of causality, this study exposes the complexity of religious-environmental entanglements in Kenya Maasailand and suggests avenues for increased engagement between conservation studies, environmental conservation, and religion. We argue that both Pentecostal studies (in Kenya, focused on urban areas) and scholarship on Maasai pastoralism would benefit from paying attention to changing religious dynamics in Kenyan pastoral areas.

From Sacred Sites to Strategic Assets: Rethinking Ovoo Worship as a form of Claim on Pasture Resources in Modern Mongolia

Batbuyan Batjav¹, Joana Roque de Pinho² & Troy Sternberg³

¹Center for Nomadic Pastoralist Studies, Mongolia

b_batbuyan@yahoo.com

²Center for International Studies (CEI), Lisbon University Institute (ISCTE-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal
myna2024mail.com

³Center for International Studies (CEI), Lisbon University Institute (ISCTE-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal & University of Oxford, UK

tsgyr@iscte-iul.pt

The *ovoo* is a central element of Mongolia's religious and cultural practice, traditionally serving as a site for offerings to the lord "ezen" of nature. In this way herders seek protection and harmony with the environment. However, in recent times, the *ovoo* ritual has evolved beyond its spiritual and cultural dimensions into a strategic tool for pastoralists.

As environmental pressures increase due to climate change, overgrazing, and resource scarcity, herders increasingly use *ovoo* to claim access to grazing territories, especially in resource-poor areas. By performing these rituals, herders not only reaffirm their spiritual connections but also enhance their social standing within their communities.

This transformation of the *ovoo*'s symbolic power intertwines with economic and political agendas, making it a marker of informal land tenure. This allows herders to negotiate access to pasturelands in a competitive landscape where state regulation and local customs intersect. Moreover, the investment

in *ovoo* rituals can be seen as an investment in cultural capital. This dynamic underscores the growing importance of cultural capital in pastoralist strategies, as herders navigate increasingly complex relationships with the land, the state, and competing pastoral groups. The *ovoo*, therefore, stands as a significant cultural marker in the ongoing negotiations over pastureland access in contemporary Mongolia.

Land, culture and religion among the Loita Maasai of Kenya

Angela Kronenburg García¹, Lenaai ole Mowuo² & Joana Roque de Pinho³

¹ The Earth and Life Institute, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium

angela.kronenburg@uclouvain.be

² Emurua Olerai, Loita, Narok County, Kenya

³ Center for International Studies (CEI), ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

This paper explores how land demarcation, the spread of evangelical Christianity and changes in Maasai culture connect in Loita, Kenya. We present findings of research based on collaborative fieldwork conducted over a period of two months in February-March 2023 and June-July 2024.

Despite several failed attempts in the past, a controversial and politicized land demarcation process to subdivide the land of the Loita Maasai in Kenya was re-started in 2020. These land tenure developments coincided with the proliferation of evangelical churches across the Loita landscape. There is evidence that some churches were built to claim rights to land in anticipation of tenure formalization. Differently from Catholicism, which has a longer presence in Loita, evangelical Christianity is strongly opposed to certain values and practices of what is locally understood to be “Maasai culture”. With more and more people joining churches, the influence of these religious ideas is increasingly becoming evident in changing ways of behaving and relating to each other.

To understand the role of evangelical churches in both the land demarcation process and in changing Maasai culture, we zoom in on two cases whereby the building of churches happened in places that were traditionally reserved for constructing ritual settlements (*manyatas*) and holding Maasai ceremonies. Should this be interpreted as yet another way of claiming unoccupied land, or is this rather a religious statement against “Maasai culture”? We approach religious organizations both as influencers of ideas and beliefs and as material actors that control resources, land and capital (Wilkins 2021).

Session 6. Conservation and Religion

Worshipping the mountain, changing the forest: sacred hills of Pentecostal Christians in the Atlantic Forest

Alexandro Solórzano & Thomaz Amadeo

Laboratório de Biogeografia e Ecologia Histórica, Departamento de Geografia e Meio Ambiente, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

alexandrosol@gmail.com

After centuries of resource exploitation and land degradation, most of the Atlantic forest remnants are cultural landscapes filled with evidence of previous usage and human dwelling. Today, especially in urban and peri-urban forests, religious practitioners are using and transforming secondary forests, often within protected areas, into sacred groves. In times of ecological crisis and environmental injustice, the lens of Spiritual Ecology, an emerging field within the Environmental Humanities, can offer a more complex understanding of spiritual practices in forest ecosystems. This research, rooted in our broader project "Forests – Cultures of the Mata Atlantic" focuses on the forest changes made by Pentecostal Christians and their challenges for protected area managers. Through fieldwork, interviews with park managers, and participation in workshops, we have documented Christian groups establishing *montes sagrados* (sacred hills and mountains) in urban and peri-urban protected areas. These sacred hills (also called "*Montes de Oração*") have become pilgrimage sites, attracting thousands of practitioners, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The religious dimensions of these practices revolve around the belief that God's work is present in the sacred elements of the forest and hills, with God's power being more intensely manifested at these *montes*. Climbing a mountain, worshipping, and learning along the way are seen as ways to access God. The mountain serves as a symbol of both physical sacrifice and spiritual ascension. The forest itself provides a quiet and protected space for spiritual practices, where trees and rocks are considered sacred elements, many times being painted with symbols and biblical passages. These religious groups create paths and trails connecting small clearings for prayer, rituals, healing sessions, and other worship activities. This often involves removing native vegetation, causing erosion, use of fire and littering. Over time, some *montes sagrados* become permanently occupied with camping areas, ranging from simple tents to complex networks. Park managers face significant challenges in balancing religious practices with forest conservation. While religious practices can potentially be allies for nature conservation, conflicts often arise. However, there is an opportunity for park managers and Pentecostal groups to find common ground that allows for religious practices without compromising the environmental integrity of the forest.

The power of increase is in you': Farming God's Way and agrospiritual transformation in Kenya's Rift Valley

Peter Rowe

Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh, UK

peter.rowe@ed.ac.uk

Over the past two decades, Farming God's Way (FGW), a theocentric conservation agriculture initiative, has been steadily gaining ground across Eastern and Southern Africa. However, entanglements between Christianity and agriculture in Africa are not new, and indeed stretch right back to the genesis of the 'high era' of Christianisation and colonisation on the continent nearly two centuries ago. In this presentation, I question if FGW makes a 'complete break' from this historical backdrop. I do this in two ways. First, I briefly trace this history of entanglement and attempt to map it onto the ways in which FGW is practised in Kenya in the here and now by looking through the lenses of method, gender, and the overall project of 'remaking' the African farmer. Second, I explore the theological framework of FGW. Building on recent theological shifts in African Christianities, FGW is imbued with Pentecostal notions of breakthrough, prosperity, and abundance. Taking this further, I explore how this theology is

grounded by examining the key space of transformation in FGW- the FGW farm. Drawing on FGW training manuals, as well as interviews with smallholders practicing FGW, I show that FGW leaders and smallholders alike share a conviction that, by practicing FGW wholeheartedly, past abundance in the Garden of Eden is available to smallholders in the present. Indeed, in seeking to transform the conventional, plough-based farms of smallholders across Kenya to a reclaimed Eden, FGW is seeking to transform both the agricultural and spiritual practice of FGW farmers. Finally, as Kenya's Rift Valley has been marked by several years of failed rainy seasons, I conclude by questioning whether it is possible for the average smallholder to 'make a complete break' from what FGW contends are the sinful practices of conventional, plough-based agriculture and practice FGW wholeheartedly in the context of challenging climatic and environmental changes.

Conservationism of Nomadic Pastoralists Seen from Relational Ontologies: The Case of Pastoralists and Nomads in Northcentral Kenya

Shinya Konaka

University of Shizuoka, Japan

africanlake@gmail.com

Pastoralists have ecologically adapted to variable and unstable environments and contributed to environmental conservation (Scoones, 1995; Niamir-Fuller, 1998; McCabe, 2004; Homewood, 2008). However, the native logic is the basis of this conservationism of pastoralists, which has not been questioned. This study explores the basic reasoning that underpins their conservationism through 'relational ontology' (Konaka & Little, 2021; Konaka et al., 2023) among pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, and foragers in Northcentral Kenya, Samburu, Tugen, Ilchamus, and Dorobo.

Based on relational approaches, pastoralists live where 'human is nature and vice versa' beyond dichotomy and dualism between human and nature (West et al., 2020). For instance, the Samburu do not regard certain household items as things but as parts of their body that should not be left behind, even during emergency evacuation (Konaka, 2022). The nomadic unit, always on the move, along with the family, household items, pets, and livestock, made boundaries unrestrained by human skin. The boundary between livestock and wild animals can be traversed by their myths and beliefs (Konaka, 2018). The author indicates that their relational ontology is reflected in perspectives of physical eyes, comprising 'savanna-horizontal perspectives (dogs have human eyes)' and 'forest-vertical perspectives (trees watch human who cut down trees), both contributing to conservation.

Therefore, the relational ontologies of pastoralists can be captured as a 'nomadic body extended seamlessly to the environment'. Their ontology never regards the environment as something that exists outside of them but as a part of them. Therefore, they strongly protect their environment. As damaging their own body is unthinkable, pastoralists care about the environment as part of their extended body on the move. Thus, their conservationism must be re-examined with reference to their relational ontologies.

Moral Imperative(s) of Conservation

Allison Hahn

Weissman School of Arts and Sciences, City University of New York, USA

Allison.hahn@baruch.cuny.edu

The reasoning behind conservation, from that of a greater good to a moral imperative, is always based on a standard of ethics which the speaker (at times erroneously) presumes to share with their audience. This paper examines the ways that pastoral nomadic communities in East Africa and Central Asia have been invited to and blocked from these deliberations and rationalizations. Juxtaposing campaigns by international conservation organizations such as the Nature Conservancy and WWF to pastoralist-run organizations, this paper investigates these clashes of ethics, moral imperatives, and global goals between international conservation and pastoralist communities. For example, in Mongolia, the WWF frames itself as “committed to the sacred cause of protecting Mongolia's biodiversity, always innovating, and working as a team with our hearts, minds and skills” (WWF). While in Tanzania, the WWF strengthens its cause by quoting, on the landing page, the founder of Tanzania J. K. Nyerere who stated, “The success or failure of our conservation efforts will not only affect the continent of Africa but the rest of the world as well” (WWF). This paper asks how these supports strengthen international funding campaigns yet are founded on a hierarchy, such as that clearly laid out by Nyerere, which presumes that pastoralists must settle, westernize, and put aside their own culture for the sake of the nation-state. Drawing directly from speeches by board members of the WWF, Nyerere, Mongolian activists, and others who have outlined this hierarchy, I utilize my own fieldwork and archival documents in these nations to ask how pastoralists organizations have responded, carved out space, and re-defined the rhetoric of conservation to create programs that support human communities alongside conservation.

From this study, I illustrate the ways that contemporary rhetoric of conservation continues to reveal colonialist hierarchies of power, importance, and at times sacrifice (Nelson, 2013). Although international organizations frequently claim to be agnostic, this study identifies both an underpinning in Judeo-Christian traditions and a rejection of the multiple religious and agnostic perspectives of pastoralist communities (Brantlinger 2003). I argue that reframing, from a historically religiously centered conservation to an apparently agnostic positioning may make it even more difficult for local communities to present their perspectives, particularly those grounded in religious ethics and practice. The importance of these clashes then connected to the 30x30 plans which have placed increasing pressure on pastoralist lands (Dawson 2024).

November 8, 2024

Session 7. From Steppes to Savannas

Chair: Eugenia Roussou, CRIA-Iscte, Portugal

Mongolia's polytheistic view of nature encounters rapid scientific and social change

Yuki Morinaga

Meiji University, Japan

ykmorinaga@gmail.com

On the Mongolian plateau nomadic herding has continued for thousands of years without significant loss of grasslands. However, in Mongolia, nature was severely affected during two changes in social conditions: the introduction of socialism at the beginning of the 20th century and the transition to capitalism at the end of the 20th century. Having grown up in postwar Japan during a period of rapid economic growth when development and environmental degradation occurred simultaneously, I have a kind of Deja vu about what is happening in Mongolia today.

In Mongolia, polytheistic nature worship such as shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism served as a deterrent to people harming nature. Rules to not damage the soil, not pollute water, and to cherish nature's bounty, such as dairy products, as sacred were important guides for living in the harsh arid lands. However, these rules are losing their power due to the momentum of economic development brought about by science and technology, and environmental damage continues in the shadows. In Japan, too, rapid modernization after the Meiji period (1868-1912), and after the World War II, led to the abandonment of rules to protect nature based on polytheistic teachings, and the country experienced severe pollution, including Minamata disease.

Looking at these phenomena in Mongolia and Japan from a religious perspective, one can see the distortions caused by the rapid introduction of Western science and technology. This was born from a monotheistic view of nature, or "power" based on the idea that man controls nature, into a polytheistic society. In this study I describe changes in the relationship between people and nature that I observed from my fieldwork in Mongolia since 2003. This evaluates how attitudes toward nature have shifted from one of respect to one of use. Next, the rapid introduction of science and technology into a polytheistic society is blamed as one of the causes of the conspicuous worsening of pollution in Japan in the postwar period. Using the Japanese experience as a lens, preventing degradation of nature in Mongolia will be presented.

Jihadism in the Sahel: Conflict, Ecology and the Rise of Muslim Orthodoxy among Fulani Pastoralists

Han van Dijk

Sociology of Development and Change Group, Wageningen University, The Netherlands

han.vandijk@wur.nl

The Sahel is often depicted as the archetype example of an area vulnerable to climate change. With its low and highly variable rainfall, high temperatures the area is prone to periodic droughts and food insecurity. Over the past decade political instability has increased enormously in the region with internal conflicts in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, with military regimes taking over power from civil government, rural insurgencies taking over control over remote areas, and clashes between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers. In this climate-conflict scenario Jihadist movements have taken root in the Sahel with Boko Haram controlling large areas near Lake Tchad and Northern Nigeria and various branches of Al Qaida and ISIS in the other countries of the Sahel. Pastoralists are figuring prominently in these Jihadist movements.

The explanations for this security crisis vary from simple climate change leading to conflict scenarios to resource scarcity and bad governance as a conflict driver, towards the intrusion of Jihadist infiltration from the Middle East and the Maghreb countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, the question remains to what extent these conflicts are driven by climatic factors and how they are related or driven by religious change, in this case Wahabi and Muslim orthodoxy that has gradually penetrated the Sahel countries over the past decades. The paper will discuss various hypotheses and the empirical evidence and will conclude that so far there is no conclusive evidence for one or the other.

Pastoralist advantage over COVID-19: Kalacha case study, Kenya

Nurit Hashimshony-Yaffe

Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo, Israel

nurithas@mta.ac.il

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted African governments, among others, to implement restrictive measures in both private and public spheres. These measures significantly altered daily life, encompassing personal directives such as mask-wearing and hand hygiene, as well as broader public restrictions like lockdowns and mobility constraints within and across national borders. Despite the considerable social, cultural, and economic differences between regions, the global restrictions were largely uniform, reflecting a widespread fear of the pandemic and a collective effort to prevent mass infections.

While governments implemented these measures uniformly—both within different regions of the same country and across different countries—populations exhibited varied adaptive responses. This research focuses on pastoral and semi-pastoral communities in Kenya, which were required to navigate these government-imposed restrictions during the pandemic. The study examines how the pastoral lifestyle influenced their response to these restrictions and how their adaptive strategies differed from those of other societal groups. It aims to identify the unique characteristics of their response and how these distinctive features were reflected in their coping mechanisms.

The primary research site is located in northern Kenya, specifically in the Kalacha desert oasis—a remote, peripheral, and desert region predominantly inhabited by the Gabra pastoral community. To further elucidate the relationship between livelihood, lifestyle, and coping strategies under COVID-19, the study also draws comparisons with the Bedouin society in Israel's Negev, which are undergoing a continuous sedentarisation process.

This research will demonstrate that, although the imposed restrictions were similar, the responses of different populations varied significantly. While governmental measures were formal and uniform, the social responses were marked by creativity and community involvement. The population displayed considerable flexibility in adapting to the restrictions. As the world moves beyond the pandemic, it is evident that while the restrictions have been lifted, the emerging grassroots responses continue to endure.

Conservation, land, and agropastoralism: A Rocha's approach

Júlio Reis

A Rocha International

julio.reis@arocha.org

A Rocha is a network of independent conservation organizations which started in Portugal in 1983 and is now present in 20+ countries. All around the world, we share this Portuguese name (meaning 'the rock') and our Five Commitments: Christian, Conservation, Community, Cultural Diversity, and Collaboration. Through our work at the intersection of religion and biodiversity, we engage with agropastoral communities in many places, including France, Lebanon, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria. Climate weirding and changes in land use put pressure on species, habitats, and the human populations that depend on them, increasing the potential for conflict. In our presentation we will briefly look at Christianity's pastoral roots and share a few stories of how our unique approach is contributing to better relations with pastoral communities and to biodiversity conservation.

Session 8. Portugal

Chair: Takahiro Ozaki, Kagoshima University, Japan

Echoes of the Ancestors: Contemporary Pagans' engagement with environmental

Joana Martins

CRIA, NOVA FCSH/IN2PAST, Portugal

martins.joanarr@gmail.com

Contemporary Paganism is a heterogeneous religious and spiritual movement that shares some common principles such as the reverence for nature, polytheism, pantheism, and/or animism, as well as the veneration of the ancestors. Additionally, it is heavily influenced by political movements like ecofeminism and environmentalism. Their connection to the environment they live in intertwines these aspects with memories and myths that strengthen this relationship. While most contemporary pagans do not directly engage in pastoralism as a way of life, living mostly in urban settings, they draw upon ancestral memories linked to such practices – from local knowledge of plants to their connection

with the natural cycles – and acknowledge the wisdom of their forebears as a source of inspiration for their environmental relationships. Moreover, they draw upon mythologies featuring deities and spirits embodying agropastoral cycles (from the Sumerian *Dumuzi*, considered the Shepherd God, to the Iberian *Atégina*, Goddess connected with the cycles and rebirth, which the sacred animal is the goat) to glean insights on how to connect with the world and its rhythms. Exploring the intersections of memory, myth, religiosity, and activism through ethnographic research conducted with contemporary pagans in Portugal for the last eight years, this paper elucidates the various ways through which contemporary pagans interact with the environment and address the environmental challenges prevalent in their daily lives.

Social and Ecological aspects of the Portuguese medieval myth of the Goat-Footed Lady

Maria Joana P. N. De Melo

Instituto de Estudos de Literatura e Tradição (IELT), NOVA FCSH, Portugal

joana.pn.mello@gmail.com

The Legend of the Goat-Footed Lady first appeared in Portuguese Medieval texts, namely in the *Livro de Linhagens do Conde Dom Pedro*, and has since had a prolific afterlife not only in literary studies but also in social and women studies, in literature, painting and new media. Although many conceive it as a local burst of the gothic imagination, inspired by Nordic Eddas and Arthurian legends, it is my view that not only does it embody the Portuguese and Galician landscape, but also conveys a tacit code for the way men should relate to nature and natural resources, whilst proposing an ethic view that escapes both Christian and Muslim theocracies.

The presentation will visit not only the written versions of the myth, the medieval XIII century chronicle and the XIX century neo-gothic version by Alexandre Herculano, in *Lendas e Narrativas*, but also the 1989 film «A Maldição de Marialva» (The Curse of Marialva), by Antonio Macedo, and finally the works of art by Paula Rego and Adriana Molder for the exhibition «A Dama Pé-de-Cabra», held in Casa das Histórias, Cascais, in 2012. In addition, I will try to break the dichotomies related to the pair culture/nature, man/woman, holy/profane, traditionally imposed by the readings of the proposed narratives, by showing how a third way is subtly presented, and how the spectral presence of the goat-footed lady allows a bridge, rather than a breakup, between two seemingly irreconcilable standpoints. By focusing on the interaction between the cultural, the natural and the supernatural, I will propose reading these texts as an aesthetic, metaphorical and cautionary way to illustrate the breaking of boundaries of knowledge.