

AASR 2014

Abstracts of Individual Papers

Arranged Alphabetically by Presenters

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Kalopsia or Kindness? Why you'll Never Find a Shaman Who Supports

Fracking

The South African Festival of Shamans is a festival with nature-based symbolism at the crux of its philosophies and acts as a space for the syncretism of various South African spiritual practices. This research essay critically analyses the potential for interaction between the festival's religious resources and the current environmental crisis. In doing so, it problematizes the assumption that nature-based belief systems are inherently focused on addressing ecological issues and instead poses that the festival acts as a guide to renegotiating perceptions of self-hood within the wider ecology. Through this, it explores to what extent the festival has immediate ecological impacts.

Atiemo, Abamfo Ofori (University of Ghana, Legon, abamfoatiemo@gmail.com)

Ritual Beyond the Worship-Setting: Pentecostalism and Social Capital Generation in South Africa and Ghana

Despite the considerable volume material produced by scholars in recent times on the political and social relevance of Africa's religious revival, policy makers and development workers continue to pay only scanty attention to religion in their work. In cases, where some attention is paid to religion, the focus has been on institutions and public spirited religious personalities. Most policy makers and development workers seem more comfortable to deal with these than the core religious elements such as rituals. Based on discussion of data drawn from some Pentecostal groups in South Africa and Ghana, this paper argues that aspects of religion such as beliefs and rituals, which are often ignored by policy makers and others, constitute an important 'spiritual capital' that can enrich social capital; and that if these are taken account of in social policy crafting, they will provide a new vista to some of the developmental challenges of Africa.

Babalola, Olatomide (College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria, tomide4christ@gmail.com)

Affinity Between Natural Milieu And Yoruba Religious Conviction

Yoruba of south-western Nigeria enjoying a rich ever-green forest and some other physical relief features which enhances their flourishing and co-existing life. These natural milieus have a profound significance in the traditional religious practices among the Yoruba people. It is generally believed among the Yoruba that there is power in these natural features that constitute their environment. It is equally viewed that gods dwell in most of these features. Consequently, most of these features were deified and commonly worshiped by various towns and villages in Yoruba land. It is against this backdrop that this paper is set to carve out the geographical location of Yoruba land and some notable natural features that make up Yoruba environment. Besides some of the features that were deified by the Yoruba is x-rayed while the mode of worship and importance attached to these features is equally discussed.

Baum, Robert M. (Dartmouth College, Hanover, USA, robert.m.baum@dartmouth.edu)

Prophetic Critiques of Agricultural Development Schemes: The Case of Alinesitoue Diatta in French Senegal

This paper examines the history of a Diola woman prophet who was active during the period of Vichy French rule in colonial Senegal. It focuses on her agricultural and environmental teachings, based on

what she claimed to be divine revelation. She rejected French emphasis on peanuts/groundnuts as a cash crop and high yield foreign rice varieties in favor of varieties that were native to West Africa. She was eventually arrested and exiled to Timbuctu where she died in exile. The emphasis of this paper is on the importance of religiously based critiques of government agricultural and environmental policies.

Bell, Dianna (Vanderbilt University, USA, dianna.bell@vanderbilt.edu)

Soothing “God’s Fight”: Ritual Action during the 1968-1974 Sahelian Famine in Mali, West Africa

In the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies, the environment across the Sahel dried out and escalated into one of the largest famines in recorded history. This study aims to expand understanding of the famine by presenting an ethnohistory of ritual and societal relations during this crisis. The paper focuses on uncovering the challenges Malians faced during the famine and the role indigenous and Islamic ritual played in opposing and relieving Malians of their harsh environment. In addition to cultivating a better understanding of the Sahelian famine by uncovering a new dimension of this critical moment in history, the narratives on how the famine was ritually managed by civilians and ritual specialists alike has bearing into how climate change is interpreted and dealt with today in West Africa and adds to understandings of how nutritional disasters in the non-industrialized world have profound social effects.

Beyers, Jaco (University of Pretoria, South Africa, jaco.beyers@up.ac.za)

What Does Religion Have to Say About Ecology? A New Appraisal of Naturalism

Religion has been defined as the activity where man engages with the spiritual realm. Man as (earthly) created matter engages with the (uncreated, spiritual, non-material) transcendental. The divide between earth/matter and spirit has been categorised as two groups: (a.) material and earthly existence is deemed impure, evil, sinful and temporary. (b.) The spiritual existence is deemed of higher ethical quality. This worldview is clearly influenced by a Hellenistic philosophical understanding which is also apparent in Jewish understanding. Eastern philosophy also identifies the spiritual existence and endeavours of higher quality than earthly and material efforts.

What then does religion as an activity focussing on the “higher” spiritual realm have to say about the “wordly” existence of created matter? Worldviews and a religious anthropology determine the outcome.

Where human existence is viewed as something other than created matter, a different relationship exists between man and nature as opposed to where human existence is viewed as being wholly part of created matter. This last stance is based on what I want to call a “comprehensive anthropology”. Feuerbach referred to this position as Naturalism. According to a naturalistic understanding, mankind is intrinsically part of nature. From nature comes all meaningful existence. This positive evaluation of nature might provide direction to a better ethical relationship between mankind and nature, contributing to a more responsible engagement with the environment.

Research goals:

1. Overview of worldviews and anthropological positions
2. Overview of religions’ positions to nature
3. A critical evaluation of Naturalism
4. Identifying implications of an appraisal of Naturalism

Biddle, Michaele (Wesleyan University, USA, mbiddle@wesleyan.edu)

The Use of Plants in the Material Culture of Writing in Northern Nigeria

With Islamic education, Arabic literacy and over a thousand years of contact with the larger Muslim world through pilgrimage, study abroad and an increasing supply of books imported and created locally, Northern Nigerian Muslims had access to the knowledge and accomplishments of the wider Islamic world which they adapted to local circumstance. Ethnography, replicative experiments and

chemical analysis of several thousand manuscripts reveal that regardless of their outward form or intended purpose, manuscript books, talisman and amulets written in Northern Nigeria were composed of locally fabricated ink and pigments on paper of European manufacture. The majority of these inks and pigments were made from local plants, a few from regionally sourced minerals. Both were thickened with one of the many locally sourced gums. Writing pens were made from African bunch grass or guinea corn stalks. The skin used to make manuscript wrappers and bags were de-haired using ash from special burnt wood, and tanned into leather with seed pods heavy in tannins. The cloth used to line these wrappers and bags was made from cotton dyed with indigo or sorghum. Ink-pots were made from gourds, writing boards from various woods and manuscripts were stored in calabash. Without a comprehensive knowledge of local botanic resources a thriving culture of writing would not have been possible. This paper looks at how and why, prior to the 20th century, such a wide variety of plants were used in Northern Nigerian manuscript book, talisman and amulet production.

Bongmba, Elias Kifon (Rice University, USA, bongmba@rice.edu)

Where Did the Forest go?

This paper reflects on the growing environmental crisis in Wimbun land in the Northwest of Cameroon. I begin the paper with a reflection and historical analysis of the disappearance of two main forests in the village of Ntumbaw, then map out the consequences of the growing environmental crisis that is looking in the village and neighboring villages and conclude by suggesting a new ethic that should motivate religious communities to do something about it.

Bunza, Mukhtar (Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, Nigeria, mbunza@hotmail.com)

Faith and Conservationism: Plants and Medicine in Some Selected Treatises in Sokoto Literature

Plants and herbs are the commonest materials for healing among most West African societies Muslims and non-Muslims; this is probably due to their exposure and affection with nature. The experience of the Sokoto Caliphate in usage and utilization of plants was not accidental or inadvertent but thoughtful and an exhibition of professionalism. Not only in literature, but in day to day practice ecology has been given a very important position, even the gates of the celebrated town of Sokoto established in 1809 as the Caliphate Headquarters has to date most of its gates named after one tree/plant or another. There is the *Rini (Botruspanda)* gate, *Kade (Siba pemdretum)* gate, and *Taramniya (Combratum mole)* gate that was in order to show the place and position plants and trees in the new civilization and dispensation. Similarly, in the dozens of medicinal manuscripts authored by the Sokoto 'Ulama' a proportionately plants are the mainstay of theory and practice of medicine in the region. Mention and recommendation of plants for cure and treatment of various ailments abound in these manuscripts. Some of the treatises are solely on the use of one plant, or in combination with another, or provide some alternative medication in addition to use plants. This paper therefore attempts to make a general survey of some plants mentioned in selected manuscripts identifying their efficacy, and botanical details depicted in these documents.

Cappai, Gabrielle (Bayreuth University, Germany, ga.cappai@uni-bayreuth.de)

Religion and Natural Environment Perception

The relevance of religion for our perceptions of the natural environment is generally supposed to be strong. As Max Weber shows, religious dogmas and ideas of salvation can affect in a radical way people's relation to the world as a whole. Weber has distinguished three main modalities of this relation: acceptance, refusal, and domination, which he put in connection respectively with Confucianism, Hinduism and Christianity (Protestantism). Despite the importance of religion and culture for environment perception, it must be recognized, that people's interests and opportunities play also an important part in shaping their images and practical approaches to the world in general and to the natural environment in particular. The interests to manipulate and to exploit the natural environment can affect our beliefs about this environment. However, given opportunities can also play a determinant role in the ways this environment is seen – sometimes despite and against our

religious beliefs. Empirical data collected in two different countries (Germany and China) are used in order to support the assumption of a reciprocal influence between beliefs, interests and opportunities.

Chirongoma, Sophia (Midlands State University, Zimbabwe, sochirongoma@yahoo.com)
Navigating Indigenous Resources That Can Be Utilized in Constructing a Karanga Eco-Feminist Theology: A Case Study of Karanga Women Within the ZIRRCOON Ecological Project in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

The war of the trees as an indigenous ecological intervention in Masvingo, Zimbabwe has been well documented by Professor Marthinus Inus Daneel in his extensive works. However, his work does not say much about the centrality of women's input towards the success of this endeavour. Standing on the shoulders of this ecological giant, the main point of departure in this essay is that it intentionally focuses on the fundamental role of Karanga women in this ecological undertaking, particularly analyzing the extent to which women were involved and empowered by the movement as already started in my earlier publication. It is significant to note that the Karanga society is highly patriarchal and most of the available literature apparently glosses over the role of women in this ecological project. Although women were the main actors in this whole undertaking, however, the leadership of both the traditional and Christian ecological ministries is highly patriarchal and it is usually the voices of such leaders that are captured in most of Daneel's writings which were reviewed by this author. Extensive fieldwork and archival research will be used to investigate a reforestation and conservation initiative in Masvingo Province of Southern Zimbabwe. The "war of the trees", as it has become known, is seen as part of the liberation from oppression, injustice, and exploitation and as part of a broader grassroots democratic movement (Chirongoma 2012) involving both Christians and practitioners of Indigenous Religion. Tree planting is accompanied by a number of elaborate rituals that illustrate its fundamentally ecumenical nature (cf. Daneel 1999): ceremonies undertaken by female spirit mediums; "green eucharists" performed by members of the Christian clergy, rituals of purification and forgiveness during which confessions are made for the deforestation of the environment; and rituals performed for endangered species.

Debele, Serawit Bekele (Bayreuth University, Germany, se1694@yahoo.com)
Ritual and Ecology: Examining Irreecha Ritual in Relation to Ecology Among the Oromo of Ethiopia

In this paper, an attempt will be made to describe and analyse the Oromo world view in relation to maintaining the ecology as an integral part of their belief system. The Oromo practice Waaqqeffana, which is the concern of this paper, at different sacred spaces; Galma, Melka, Oda tree and Tulu being the main ones. These are sacred sites where various religious rituals including Irreecha take place. Irreecha, according to the Oromo religion, is a ritual because of which people come together twice per annum. The first one, known as Irreecha Tulu, is held on top of a sacred mountain during the dry season to request Waqa for rain as well as good harvest. The second one, known as Irreecha Melka is held at a sacred lake known as Hora Arseddi. It is held after the rainy season is gone and is meant to express gratitude to the creator who saw his people through the rainy season and who provided them in accordance with their prayers. Thus, taking Irreecha as an example, this study seeks to explore the intertwined nature of ecology and religious rituals.

Emeka-Nwobia, Ngozi Ugo (Ebonyi State University, Nigeria, ngemeknwobia@yahoo.com)
The God factor in the Construction of Leadership in Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's Political Rhetoric

Barely a year after leaving office as Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo enrolled for a Post Graduate Diploma to study Christian Theology in National Open University of Nigeria. This move triggered a lot of reaction by Nigerians at home and in Diaspora on the intent of the ex-president's decision. This study sets out to examine former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo's political rhetoric to see how he uses 'the God factor' in the construction of leadership. It explores how linguistic resources and rhetorical strategies are exploited by politicians in Africa when persuading,

influencing and alluring the general populace (listeners) into taking their stand. The work shall be drawing excerpts from Obasanjo's political discourses during his period of governance as a democratically elected president of Nigeria (1999-2007). Drawing from vox pop (e.g. newspapers and the internet) and interviews with locals who were adults during his regime, excerpts from the political speeches of this President were randomly collected and subjected to discourse analysis. The rationale for choosing these methods is 1) to assess the President's rhetorical strategies, 2) to determine how meaning was constructed and deconstructed by this speaker, and 3) to analyse how presidents use 'the God factor' as a persuasive strategy in political communication. Language is here seen as a powerful weapon that is exploited by politicians who skilfully deploy words infused with diverse metaphors that influence and/ or motivate the listeners/ hearers.

Falako, Francis Omoyele (University of Lagos, Nigeria, omoyelefalako@yahoo.com)

Environmental Education (Ee) In Nigeria: Content Analysis of Secondary Schools' Christian Religious Studies Textbooks

The challenge of environmental degradation with its attendant ills such as climate change, pollution and flooding is a source of serious concern to all, particularly the academia. Hence, all hands are on deck to ameliorate the situation and save man from destructive attitudes; one of the ways is education towards re-orienting people's perception of the environment. The need to include Environmental Education (EE) in the curricular of schools is most pressing so as to make the right impression in the formative years of the youths. In Nigerian, the need for Environmental Education (EE) at all levels of educational system was articulated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) among other promulgations; hence, at the secondary school levels, Environmental Education (EE) is integrated into Social Studies. However, the 1967 historic pronouncement of Lynn White (Jnr.) on Christianity as being the most anthropocentric has brought debates on a theology of the environment to the front burner and made the Holy Bible come alive to help arouse Christians into more positive involvement in the world. This paper analysed recommended textbooks to determine the extent in which the contents are oriented to laying a good foundation in Biblical bases for environmental awareness. Using a researcher-made checklist for coding, six textbooks were evaluated to decipher assumptions, themes and illustrations; data collected were analysed using simple percentages. The findings revealed only allusions to concepts while recommendations included concerted efforts at integrating environmental issues into the curriculum and that textbook authors should relate Biblical concepts to life.

Fortune, Sibanda (Great Zimbabwe University, sibanda35@gmail.com)

Chanting Down Same-Sex Relations: Reflections on Rastafari Communities in Postcolonial Zimbabwe

Globally, same-sex relations have become a hotly debated issue in intellectual, religious, political and human rights discourses. In the majority of African nations, the phenomenon of same-sex relations has been outlawed as largely 'unAfrican' and hence, a 'western' and morally defunct legacy. In the majority of cases an appeal is made to the biblical and African traditions as the basis for shooting down the practice or even for supporting it. Whereas, many of the debates concerning homosexuality in public space and religious contexts zero down to the views of the major religions in Africa such as Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religions (AIRs), this study uses Rastafari communities to explore, interrogate and evaluate their perspectives on same-sex relations in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The paper seeks to show that the ideals of Christianity and AIRs against homosexuality are replicated in Rastafari. The study posits that the Rastafari call for social justice and human rights have a selective application as their motive for peace, love, harmony and tolerance are inconceivable towards people engaged in same-sex relations. The research established that Rastas are inspired by the element of natural livity and appeal to biblical texts to 'chant down' homosexuality as a western cultural product to be suppressed at all costs. The study engaged a multi-disciplinary approach to collect, describe and analyse data. The study utilised postcolonial theory as a theoretical framework and employed a socio-spatial analysis to examine the language, metaphors and typologies emerging from Rasta views on same-sex relations in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observation and documentary analysis. Insights from the phenomenological approach

were also tapped to describe and establish an 'inside' picture of the participants. The study concludes that in 'speaking back to the centre' from the margins, Rastafari communities uphold a theology of exclusion towards a sub-culture of homosexuals without any due consideration to broader questions of human rights and social justice. They evoke binaries that juxtapose 'us' and 'them' to the extent of regarding homosexuality as queer and expressing 'demoncracy' rather than democracy in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Hauhs, Michael (University of Bayreuth, Germany, michael.hauhs@uni-bayreuth.de)

Do Collective Memories Match Individual Experiences in National Parks? A Consistency Check for Models of Nature

Wilderness is for 'Moderners', people who often adopted a dominantly secular, enlightened world view, in several aspects a challenging concept. Looking back in time it represents a forgone stage in their own evolution, something that needed to be overcome by culture or civilisation. Looking out around them it represents a diminishing realm of the biosphere still untouched by humans which needs preservation. Wilderness as a collective memory has been reconstructed by sciences, e.g. anthropology studies 'where we come from'. The modern narratives of civilisation history and of evolutionary history are divided by a first conceptual gap. Modern individuals regarding themselves as emancipated from nature "emerged" eventually from wild ancestors. Today, wilderness is offered to visitors of national parks as a valuable individual experience. However, there lies a potential inconsistency: The second conceptual gap of 'Moderners' addresses the dichotomy by which their environment is classified into nature and culture. National parks in Africa as icons of 'wild nature' illustrate the interesting and problematic ways by which 'Moderners' relate their actual observations of 'nature' to what they memorise and value about 'nature' as part of their culture, i.e. the various ways in which these two conceptual gaps become related. Here, we use models and modelling concepts to illustrate the cosmologies of various stakeholders in their versions of nature conservation by means of national parks in Africa. Based on the four cosmologies proposed by Descola (2005) "Beyond Nature and Culture" we provide examples how the values of nature are assigned to wilderness areas and whether or not the models behind the two conceptual gaps are consistent or not.

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Changing Face of Christianity, Change Face of Zambian Politics?

Two days after his inauguration as fifth President of Zambia, on 25 September 2011, Michael Chilufya Sata attended midmorning mass at St. Ignatius Church in Rhodespark, Lusaka, following his usual routine. During mass he made the promise that his government will abide by the biblical Ten Commandments. This announcement was reminiscent of second Republican President, Frederick Chiluba who weeks after his inauguration in 1991 declared the following: 'I declare today that I submit myself as president to the lordship of Jesus Christ.' The obvious difference was that the "born-again" Chiluba went on to state that 'I submit the government and the entire nation of Zambia to the lordship of Jesus Christ', declaring Zambia a Christian Nation. Researchers have described this declaration as the inevitable outcome of the rise of Charismatic Christianity in Zambia. This paper will deal with the resurgent attention to the role of religion in Zambian politics. Should it be the dominant analytical lens to view Zambia's recent political past as suggested by a number of authors? Drawing a parallel with Marshall's study on southern Nigeria, can we confidently state that for Zambia 'Pentecostalism constitutes the single most important sociocultural force...'? Is this statement actually borne out by empiricism? The paper will argue that treating religious movements and its adherents generically, threatens to ignore the complex reality on the ground.

Homewood, Nathanael Jedidiah (Rice University, USA, njh2@rice.edu)

"I Was On Fire": The Challenge of Counter-Intimacies Within Zimbabwean Christianity

This paper will explore the experiences of those who consciously invoke counter-intimacies within the sanitized, heteronormative and homophobic public of Zimbabwean Pentecostalism. Counter-

intimacies in normal publics such as religious spaces need further exploration and this is exactly where this paper hopes to intervene: what do counter-intimacies look like, aim at, and accomplish in some of the most adamantly and explicit heteronormative publics, such as Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches? In conjunction with ethnographic data gathered in Zimbabwe I begin by engaging Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in their 1998 article, “Sex in Public” which made an important theoretical interjection that both challenged the breadth of heteronormativity and enhanced sexuality as a category of analysis. They asserted that the oppressive realities that undergird heterosexual culture are revealed when heterosexual publics come into contact with dissident sexualities. Dissident sexualities - or counter-intimacies - necessarily impart a performativity and political significance that cannot be reduced to the private. And each performance of a counter-intimacy - regardless of whether it is deemed intimate in the heteronormative register - carries the transformative possibility of affect in public. By interjecting sex into the public – a necessarily queer interjection - heteronormativity is challenged and new possible publics and cultures emerge.

This paper explores Zimbabwean Pentecostalism as a space where counter-intimacies are performed and could be seen as an alternative and innovative statement of social resistance. In this case, the queer religious ritual is a choice to go through, not against, the normal. Such a choice is not the same as submitting to heteronormativity. In fact, that it goes through not against religion is profound as religion is so intimately associated with publics and political modes deemed inadequate to say anything about queer sexuality. It is a public that allows for the performance of dissent through spectatorship and frees people to name trauma without revealing the specifics of their personal pain. I will argue that queer persons who intentionally inhabit the normal public of religion rely on both trauma and acceptance, pain and pleasure, excess and avoidance to craft an identity that inflects queerly, yet with publicity, religion.

Igboin, Benson Ohihon (Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria, ohisuccess@yahoo.com)

The Ancestors and the Groves in Iuleha: Interrogating the Role of the Ancestors in Preserving Contemporary Environment

Iuleha, a clan in Owan West Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria, was known for thick forests, believed to be preserved by taboos. The belief that the ancestors watched over the environment was so strong that almost everyone wanted to avoid their anger as much as possible. Many stories were told constantly that helped to purvey the efficacy of the powers of the ancestors to deal with violators of the environment, most especially the sacred spaces. But since the 1990s, a different way of stories swayed that presented the environment as a goldmine or treasure-trove that needed to be explored, indeed, exploited. In the process, not even the sacred groves were spared by the rapacious violators. This paper questions what has happened to the ancestors, who hitherto helped in preserving the environment; why have the myths which used to inspire fear and reverence for the environment lost their potency, etc. It would be argued that new, creative myths would need to be enacted to stem the tide of unceasing ‘de-environmentalisation.’

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An Eco-Theological Interpretation of Proverbs 5:15-20 in the Light of Water Crises Experienced in Present-day Africa

Proverbs 5:15-20 is not about ecological issues such as water management. However, the author employed water-related metaphors as a way of speaking about fidelity in marriage. The young man is instructed to drink water from his own cistern/well and advised to restrain himself from the wastage of this precious natural resource in public areas (vv 15-16). The water-related metaphors bring to mind certain understandings of the value and uses of water. The water management metaphors in Proverbs 5:15-20 are relevant in contemporary Africa where water crises have developed not necessarily because of a lack of water resources, but often because of issues related to water management and sanitation. The question is: Which assumptions about, and attitudes towards water

have informed the author's use of water-related metaphors in an attempt to promote faithfulness in marriage? This question guides my attempt at an ecological interpretation of Proverbs 5:15-20, which is done in terms of a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval/trust. Two of the six eco-justice principles associated with the Earth Bible Project are employed, namely the principles of *intrinsic worth* and *interconnectedness*.

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Africa's Future Environment: Concepts of Appropriation and Conservation of "Nature"

The paper relates first findings of an ongoing comparative and interdisciplinary research in some national parks in Africa. We assume the African national park to be an export from the West, imposed upon colonial Africa. It is based on the epistemic division of the world into the spheres of "nature" and "culture", and represents one of the most concrete manifestations of the dichotomist divide characterising "modern" thinking since the time of enlightenment. We further assume that the particular epistemic division of the world into the spheres "nature" and "culture" meets other epistemologies, articulating with them in specific ways. Here, we take Philippe Descola's proposition as a starting point. Descola suggests the classification of epistemologies into four ideal-types, which can be represented according to the criteria of internality vs. externality and the criteria of continuity vs. discontinuity.

The nature-culture distinction is traditionally used as a spatial delineation: culture on one side, nature on the other. Hence management issues predominantly deal with mutual dependencies in space. In order to preserve nature, for example, national parks are separated from the realm of human culture. In our research, we are concerned with temporal relationships between humans and their (natural) environments. Nature is conceptualized as an interface at which some events can be actively repeated, or they appear as series of unique historical events. We study how different stakeholders in national parks conceptualize their respective notions of 'nature' as historical narratives relative to their own competences of participating in this history. The paper will mostly refer to findings in a wildlife reserve in Ethiopia (Afar) and a natural reserve in Northern Niger.

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Terrific Goddesses in the City. Amman Worship Among Hindus in Durban, South Africa

When the ancestors of South African Hindus left Indian villages for Africa one and half century ago, they did not leave their worship nor beliefs behind. Closer than ever they kept their *Amman*, the Ultimate Protector and Mother Goddess, as they faced the new and unexplored environments of a foreign continent with open eyes, with which to recognize the spaces that are the natural manifestations of her gigantic power (*Parasakti*), ergo places of worship – their new home. Soon upon their arrival, natural shrines were established and regular worships were offered to the many forms of the ever merciful fearful Mother Goddess. As the community developed and gained resources, first permanent temple structures were built and regular public prayers and festivals took off in KwaZulu Natal and streets of Durban.

This paper introduces the complex and paradoxical deity *Amman*, the Universal Supreme Mother Goddess of South African Hindus in Durban and explores the various sacred spaces which are constructed or established for the purposes of *Amman* worship via means of specific ritual practices.

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Kierkegaard and Ecology; Is There a Teleological Suspension of the Ecological?

How could anyone oppose the idea that Christians should care for the environment? To make a case for care for the environment, in Africa and beyond, it is important to understand the counterarguments as well. For example, the well-known theologian Robert Jenson writes in his *Systematic Theology* (II, 113n): "Recent waves of 'creation spirituality' are simply apostasy to paganism. And it is such

unguarded, even unargued judgment that is required of the church." Why this ferocious attack, so typically hidden in a footnote?

In this paper Kierkegaard's concept of 'teleological suspension' is used to discuss one important counterargument. Is there a teleological suspension of the ecological? In other words: should we sacrifice the environment in favor of a higher goal, such as for example our salvation? Does salvation outweigh ecology?

In this paper I will first show how the neglect of ecology in very different branches of theology can be clarified using the concept of 'teleological suspension' taken from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Mainline theologians such as Jenson will be discussed, but also the prosperity gospel's advocacy for a consumer lifestyle, and evangelical theologies in which ecology seems to be a blind spot - its importance seems to be suspended.

Second, I will analyze to what extent counterarguments against ecology along these lines are valid. I will rely on Kierkegaard's discussion of abuse of his own approach in *The Book on Adler*. Third, I will present a proposal for how to accommodate Kierkegaardian counterarguments in the Christian plea for ecology.

Kubai, Anne (Uppsala University, Sweden, anne.kubai@teol.uu.se)

Kirimaara and Nyambene: the 'Speckled' and the 'Masculine' Mountains of God Among the Ameru of Kenya

This paper, which is a contribution to an anthology (to be published in Swedish) on God(s) and mountains, focuses on how these mountains came to influence the traditions and indeed the psyche of the Meru people of Kenya in historical times – how the mountain landscape has shaped the development of the Meru social, political and economic institutions. We have illustrated here that of all the sacred spaces in Meru, Kirimaara and Nyambene take pride of place. The two mountains symbolized the woman and man in the Meru tradition. In an absolute sense, these two mountains sustained life – rain, rivers, agriculture and spirituality of the Meru. Thus they performed divine functions of the creator of life – Mt. Kenya, the female, the mother and Nyambene the procreator, the male organ. Tradition was predicated on the mountains' topography and resources that were used to fulfill spiritual, medical and other human needs were obtained from the sacred forests. Thus ecology shaped the communities' destiny as landscape became spiritualized. Hills and gorges sustained community identities as they marked geographical and social boundaries. Kirimaara allowed diversity and included in a greater unity, yet it divided the people into ridge communities characterized by exogamous and endogamous congeries.

We also recall that "religious phenomena appear in real relationship with the earth's surface and so can be studied geographically" (Fickeler, cited in Levine, 1996:429). We have used geography of religion as an analytical framework to illuminate our analysis of the symbolism of these two mountains in the traditions of the Meru people both in time and space; and therefore, how the whole gamut of life became dependent on the landscape and an environment essentially nurtured by Mt. Kenya and Nyambene mountains. To the Meru, atop these mountains is God's abode and the physical features of the mountains are imbued with religious symbolism; while the rivers that run from their bosom give life to humans, animals and the vegetation. Through an analytical framework that relates geography and cultural beliefs and practices, we can elucidate the temporal and spiritual relationship between the people and the mountains, which are not ostensibly religious, but to which deep sacrality has been attributed by the ethnic communities who live around them, particularly the Kikuyu and the Meru.

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Reflections on the Transformation of the Practices of ‘Islamic’ Medicine in Southern Katsina (Nigeria)

Such Nigerian medical texts in Arabic as we have from the 19th century (e.g. on problems of the kidney and the eye, and on *basur*, as well as *tibb al-nabi*) do not specify the local equivalents of the Arabic names used for plants &c., nor do they suggest dosage or the part of the tree to be used – thus making the practical use of these texts problematic, especially for sick children (who are much the majority of patients in real life). Indeed the texts seem primarily written for ‘*ulama*. However even a diagnosis like *basur* can in common parlance have meanings that differ widely from ‘piles’ or haemorrhoids. Furthermore, herbal matter is only a part of therapies Muslims in Nigeria actually buy – the *materia medica* include animal heads (7 sorts), horns (6 sorts), skins (8 species), fats (6 sorts) as well as various minerals – mainly for spiritual protection. Finally, the most senior Kano city healer (at his ‘hospital’ just outside the *birni*) once showed me his shelf of Arabic medical texts, but said he never consulted them. Hence many such texts have now been translated and published in *boko*-script Hausa for all to buy and read.

This paper looks instead at how contemporary (i.e. 2013) therapy in a large Muslim farmstead has changed, along with the repertoire of illnesses, Islamic sects (e.g. *туруq*), the tree cover, the birds, the spirits (*al-jinn*) recognised as present. I suggest, therefore, that precise dating and context are needed to determine the dynamic course of therapeutic practice in an apparently “traditional”, deep-rural community.

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Indigenous Sacred Days in Zimbabwe and Cameroon as Conservation Strategy

This paper discusses the observation of indigenous sacred day of rest (*chisi*) and (*mbomnta*) as a religious and political institution in Zimbabwe and among the Wimbun people of the Northwest Province of Cameroon. The paper explores the history behind these sacred days, their broad reach in the case of Zimbabwe and their specificity among different Wimbun villages and compares their meaning and analyses contemporary attitudes towards these sacred days. The paper then raises questions about the viability of using these days as a conservation strategy in the communities under discussion.

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Taught by an Ant? A Holistic African-South African Reading of Proverbs6:1-11

Committed to an ethic of industry, also, possibly persuaded by the precarious context of the production of the text of Proverbs, the wisdom teacher persuades his (male)students to watch and learn from an ant (*namala*), an insect. The *namala* can be regarded as one of the lowest members of the created species. Apart from the optimistic wisdom mentality embedded within Proverbs6:1-11, noteworthy is also an inter-connectedness between human beings and nature. The latter reveals the holistic outlook which typified biblical Israel, including the members of the post-exilic community in Yehud. Research on the wisdom underlying both the Hebrew Bible proverbs and selected African (Northern Sotho) proverbs, has revealed apparent resemblances between the Israelite and African world views. If Proverbs6:1-11 is read from an African-South African holistic point of view, which insights might be gained from the text regarding the interconnectedness between human beings and Earth? Could the insights gained prove helpful in an unequal context such as present day South Africa? The preceding questions among others will form the core of the contents of the present paper.

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Manuscripts de l'Institut Ahmed Baba et la Pharmacopée (Manuscripts of the Ahmed Baba Institute and Pharmacopoeia)

Les manuscrits de Tombouctou et du Mali d'une manière générale représentent un trésor immense et un gisement dont les réserves sont inestimables. Ils matérialisent le passé glorieux de ce peuple et mettent en lumière l'apport combien considérable de ses savants dans le développement intellectuel, spirituel et sanitaire de l'homme.

La médecine traditionnelle est en soi un témoignage incontesté du savoir faire légué par nos illustres savants. Ils ont pu adapter cette pratique aux réalités socioculturelles et environnementales de leur milieu. Dans cet article, nous essayons dans un premier temps de faire un aperçu général sur les manuscrits de l'Institut Ahmed Baba traitant la pharmacopée, sous forme de catalogue, avec le numéro du manuscrit, le titre, l'auteur, le copiste, le nombre de feuillets et une brève présentation du contenu.

Dans un second temps choisir deux manuscrits pour les étudier et les présenter de manière détaillée. Tout en espérant que ce travail facilitera la tâche aux chercheurs et aux étudiants qui souhaitent aborder ce domaine.

(The manuscripts of Timbuktu and Mali in general represent an immense treasure and a priceless deposit. They embody the glorious past of this people and highlight how significant the contribution of its scholars in the spheres of intellectual life, spiritual health and human development. Traditional medicine is in itself an undisputed testimony of knowledge bequeathed by our illustrious scientists. They were able to adapt this practice to their sociocultural and environmental realities. In this paper, we try at first to provide an overview of the manuscripts of the Ahmed Baba Institute treating the pharmacopoeia, and to give all information related to manuscript number, title, author, copyist, the number of leaves and a brief presentation of the content. In a second step, we choose two manuscripts for study and present in detail. We hope that this work will facilitate the work of researchers and students who wish to address this area of study.)

Maposa, Richard Shadreck (Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University, maposars@gmail.com)

Indigenous Religion and Environmental Challenges: Phenomenological Reflections on the Role of Environmental Management Agency (EMA) in Zimbabwe

Discourses on environment abound in different world fora. The issue of environment justice has called for religionist scholars to explore the relationship between religion and development. The paper explores the effectiveness of Environmental Management Agency (hereinafter referred to as EMA) in Zimbabwe as an interventionist measure against man-made environment degradation. The study posits that EMA harnesses the local religio-cultural prism in the execution of its mandate as it engages environmental issues. The indigenous Zimbabwean society is incurably religious and any engagement with these societies should be religion-oriented. In addition, the study argues that indigenous knowledge system is environment-friendly and moral and ethical dimensions which come of any religion are indispensable pre-requisites in militating against environment challenges. The role of EMA in environment issues has brought to the fore that indigenous religious beliefs and practices are environment-friendly. EMA has to engage them in carrying out its mandate for environment justice. The research makes use of the qualitative and quantitative designs to solicit information. The study discovered that the role of EMA is characterized by ambivalence with some people regarding it as the right way to go while others view EMA as one of the government policies that are churned from the top. This top-down policy formulation denies the implementers the right to decide and they feel the policy is not for them. The study posits that policy formulation and implementation in Zimbabwe should engage the religio-cultural dimensions of the indigenous people.

Key words: Environment, management, indigenous religion, indigenous knowledge system, sustainable development, environment justice

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Dis-possession: Islam, Spiritscapes, and Changing Ecological Ethos in Niger

The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of incidents of mass possession among schoolgirls in Niger. Possession by brutal, revengeful spirits dramatizes the controversies surrounding women's education in Nigerien society. Rather than address the moral panic set in motion by Nigerien girls' growing presence in schoolrooms, I focus on other claims to spaces articulated in the language of spiritual ecology. During exorcism, possessing spirits speak of the homes they lost when trees were cut to build schools. As original owners of the land, these spirits constitute a sacred topography disrupted by the transformation of the bush into farmland, the shift toward individual property, and urban expansion. In the pre-Islamic past, landmarks such as trees objectified the tenuous relations between people and spirits, configuring the landscape into a vibrant microcosm. Only after securing the spirits' approval could one cut a tree; spirit veneration thus translated into an ecological ethos that guided the management of natural resources. In the wake of colonization, trees were cut to make way for road and human settlements. Later the implementation of new agrarian practices and the promotion of Islamic law further encouraged land clearing and the subsequent destruction of the spiritscape. Today spirits haunt the "edge of Islam" (McIntosh 2009), giving voice to conflicts over moral and material spaces, their boundaries, and their histories. Like the past they come from, they demand to be remembered. In an age of renewed anxiety over the definition of Islam and Muslim practices, schoolgirls caught by violent spirits demanding to be remembered thus obliquely call attention to the ways that some spaces are remembered, experienced, and struggled over.

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Sustaining the Wild Coast: the Relationship Between the Ecology and the People

SWC was started as an organisation of volunteer-professionals guided by local people, to embark on the promotion and support of development plans that emerge from communities themselves. SWC emphasises 'bottom up' development that is based on empowering local communities where poverty reduction is purposefully designed to benefit the poor and ecological integrity is retained.

Sustaining the Wild Coast's (SWC) focus is on traditional rural communities living along Pondoland's Wild Coast, in the northern coastal regions of the former Transkei. We work with people, residents in the area to enhance local leadership ability, skills, knowledge and entrepreneurial capacity so that local communities may have a healthy capability to:-

- make informed decisions about the impacts of developments that affect their future and the future of this unique region.
- become active participants in creating their own future and in improving their livelihoods prospects.
- become aware of the value of maintaining their unique cultural and ecological heritage.
- SWC focuses on finding sustainable development solutions that local people feel will improve their livelihood prospects, while respecting local cultural traditions and maintaining the wealth of natural biodiversity and unique 'sense of place' that the Wild Coast is re-known for.

The Pondoland 'Wild Coast' forms part of the Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Global Biodiversity Hotspot. It is an area that is globally re-known for its rich wealth of plant endemism, with numerous plant species occurring here that are found no-where else in the world. Traditional amaMpondo culture is an agrarian based culture. Many communities retain deep ancestral roots to the land. They consider the landscape to be very significant to their sense of identity. High reliance on natural resources means a healthy ecology is essential to their well-being. Despite its rich wealth of plant endemism and the richness of local ecological knowledge, Pondoland Wild Coast and its people is under immense pressure of proposed mining and N2 toll road development initiatives by hegemonic forces. The AmaMpondo people realized the negative impact of both initiatives that seeks to undermine their livelihoods, damage their indigenous vegetation, strip off their indigenous knowledge systems as well as their connectedness with nature. Again the local community's evolving consciousness continue to depict key issues that the EIA's of this world fail to highlight that is the

effects of mining and toll road on the lives of women, the impact of mining and toll road on community's social fabric as well as sense of belonging and spiritual being.

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Isitshisa

This paper is about Isitshisa. It is the annual religious ritual, worship service and festival performed by the members of the Corinthian Church in South Africa at E Section of Umlazi in Durban during the last week end of October. It centres on the slaughtering of the red heifer. This becomes the focus of fellowship and friendships, where sharing with the blind and others takes the centre stage. Besides commemorating the life, charitable work and service of the Founder, Johannes Richmond, more importantly, the members consider the worship service as a source of spiritual blessing and more importantly as having implications for service.

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Unearthing the Essence of Nature and the Perception of the Natural Landscape among the amaXhosa in the Eastern Cape: An Exploratory Study

The recognition of the close link between the lifestyles of 'indigenous' and 'local' people and biodiversity is widely acknowledged as crucial, not only for the survival of biological diversity but also for the protection of cultural diversity. Most discussions centre on the argument that cultural diversity can, through a wide variety of uses and practices, sustain and conserve biodiversity, particularly in many developing countries. However, local people's relationship with natural landscapes and the extent to which they value biodiversity has not been fully explored and is in most cases misunderstood, which in fact undermines this bio-cultural diversity link. This misunderstanding exists primarily because the majority of environmental or ecological research conducted so far has been oriented towards economic valuation, in quantifying the estimated value of plants and fauna utilised by local people. Consequently, biodiversity is primarily treated as a commodity, with wild harvested plant products being classified as either having subsistence, or commercial and medicinal value. I argue that the purely economic valuation of natural resources is simplistic, and biased, and thus conceals the critical, profound meaning of the intangible values of the environment among local communities in everyday life context. Thus, this study seeks to address this limitation by exploring the cultural, spiritual, and psychological values of natural landscapes among ordinary people in the peri-urban and urban communities of Ndlambe Village and Grahamstown, respectively.

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Contiguous Modes of Sacredness in the Matobo Hills of Zimbabwe

Utilizing the notion 'religion' beyond its conventional limits and using it rather as a heuristic tool this study explores sacral practices of various actors in relation to their natural environment in and around the Matobo National Park in Zimbabwe. The colonial imposition of the idea of the national park as a space to be set apart from mundane human activity in the Matobo area, a region which is the core area of the Mwali oracular cult, led to the adjacency of varied sacralities of nature. The 'religions' in question pertain to nature conservation practices in the Matobo National Park and rain-seeking practices in the greater Matobo Hills area. Classification and description of these neighboring 'religions' of nature and description of their interaction will lead to an appreciation of land use disputes and opportunities for cooperation.

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The Cross-cultural and Cross-Religious Resilience of Rain Prayers in Southern African History

African religions in southern Africa have had a strong environmental emphasis, particularly in respect to ritual activity concerning rain, and water more generally. Rain rituals aimed at the appeasement of and/ or the procurement of blessings from ancestors/ local divinities were of central concern to

indigenous religions in pre-colonial times. It has often been stated that indigenous religions, particularly African religions, have differed from Western Christianity in the sense that the dualistic dichotomy of 'spiritual' and material concerns remains something of a foreign construct. This is for example typified in the way that African Initiated Churches, which have successfully hybridised indigenous religious concerns and their own interpretations of missionary Christianity, continue to exemplify a pattern of material religion that focuses on physical well-being, including issues of individual health and prosperity. Likewise the indigenous emphasis on the relatively scarce resources of rain and water has been carried over into the context of African Initiated Christianity. When colonial Christian missionaries first confronted indigenous African religions, missionaries often derided these local traditions as simple 'superstition' reflecting what was perceived as the generally ignorant, even backward social state of indigenous African societies. Of course there were exceptions such as the London Missionary Society's Johannes van der Kemp and the famous case of the Anglican Bishop Colenso, who both in their respective life stories challenged the dominant colonial paradigm of Western (European) superiority. Names such as these are rightly well-known to posterity, because of the exceptional nature of how they chose to interact with the indigenous population, as if they actively anticipated an era of increased equality. The fact that this type of stance was hardly the norm is illustrated by the adverse reception someone like Colenso received from other Anglicans, even to the point of being deposed of his bishopric, all due to his uncompromising insistence that Zulu religious sensibilities needed to be taken seriously. Contrary to this the colonial norm suggested that there was very little worth preserving in the indigenous traditions.

Afrikaner Reformed missionaries were possibly even more adversarial in their approach. Yet like some of their more liberal-minded British counterparts they too tended to take rain rituals seriously. This is illustrated by the fact that there are historical examples of Afrikaner missionaries becoming involved in what might be described as rain-praying competitions with the local traditions. In their autobiographies missionaries present their Christian prayers as hugely successful. However, what I find surprising is the fact that some of these Christian missionaries might have been converted to an indigenous understanding of how to respond to the environmental issue of rain and its procurement. Right through the 20th century up until now Afrikaner communities continue to approach rain prayer with utter seriousness. Is the historical and cross-cultural prevalence of rain prayer an example of indigenous resilience and translatability? Did some missionaries experience a reversed colonization of their consciousness through their contacts with indigenous Africans? These are some of the questions I hope to address in my paper.

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Environment and African Indigenous Religion: Reflections on Food Security Among the Ndau People of North-East Chipinge

This article focuses on the role of African indigenous religion(s) (AIR) in compacting environmental degradation and affirming stability of food security among the Ndau people of North-East Chipinge, Zimbabwe. The study investigates into the question of religious taboos in light of the divine punishment embedded in the essence of the African Traditional Religion(s) (ATR) in the protection and preservation of the environment. Drawing examples from Chief Mapungwana's and chief Musikavanhu's structural organisation in public rituals and mushandirapamwe (working together projects) and doro remakoto (rain making ceremony) in Ndau society, – the study argues that the religion fosters and promotes

mutuality, reciprocity, togetherness and positive attitudes towards the environment. Premising the entire argument on the foregoing insights, the study envisages that the tripartite cosmology of the Africans immensely contributes to the conservation of the ecosystem. Since the article is engrossed in upholding the notion of interconnectedness between nature and humanity, it intricate the perpetual in divine food provision through reliable rains, good harvests, and ubiquitous existence of both domestic and wild fruits in the vicinity and thereby ensures food security to the Ndau people. In cognisance of the food abundance, the ATR through some divine restrictions ensures equal sharing and shuns out the notion of mbau (greedness). However bemoans the adversities infiltrating the communities due to the new interface between AIR and Christianity as the latter encroaches into the territorial boundaries

of the former through the wave of modernity and globalisation. Nevertheless, the study postulates strategies to relegate out the destructive intermarriage.

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Protecting, Healing and Sustaining the Ukambani Environment: Individual and Community Rituals in Kenya, 2008-2012

In Ukambani, located in South Central Kenya, 98.5% of surveyed participants in 2008 acknowledge the use and importance of rituals in their lives. Rituals are often defined simply as things people do to sustain and manage their environment. However, the rituals performed to restore individuals and communities back to a normal or stable state are far from simple. The performance is a careful blend of the past and the present that evolve over time.

Wakamba ritual men and women in Ukambani (rural Kenya) are often known for their abilities to seek out the spiritual root of afflictions and environmental pollutants using meticulously performed, learned, designed and structured symbols, gestures, artifacts, and utterances to move participants from one ritual state to another. This work investigates the ritual performance and ceremonial acts in Ukambani, an area known for remembering and upholding the spiritual ways of their ancestors. This study relies on a combination of sources from 2008-2012, including field interviews, surveys, re-enactments, and archived evidence to show the complexity of environmental rituals. It also profiles the work and new spaces of women ritual specialist that have embraced traditional knowledge. The study explores the timeless balance that must exist for survival in a changing and dynamic environment. It argues that rituals are still relevant and practiced in environmental issues in modern Kenya.

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The Dead in the Practice of Environmental Ethics: A Comparative Study of the Care and Maintenance of Religious and Public Cemeteries in a Nigerian City of Ile-Ife

Indigenous peoples of Africa treated their dead with utmost sacredness. Since the dead were considered 'living' and part of the community in all situations. Among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, the dead were buried in the family compounds and around their houses. With the advent of Christianity, cemeteries were introduced into the cities where Christian missions were established. Due to economic migration, Muslims established cemeteries in their places of sojourn. The third dimension of cemetery occupation was noticed in those cities where public institutions like schools and hospitals were established. Also, in the recent time, local government institutions have begun to acquire spaces where the dead are buried.

The above presents to us three noticeable attitudes and practices that emerge from Christians, Muslim and the public on the treatment of dead, and the care and maintenance of cemeteries constructed by Christian institutions, Muslim 'stranger' communities, and local government areas in Ile-Ife. Notably, the diverse attitudes expressed by the different groups call into question certain ethical issues. Muslim communities take great care of their cemeteries since to them, such duty was regarded 'sacred' and reward-able by Allah. On certain occasions held as "saints' day", Christian groups care and perform cleansing duties on the cemeteries. For the public cemeteries: where they demarcate Christian and Muslim burial spaces, those of the Muslims are well kept by Muslim faithfuls while those of the Christians are occasionally taken care of only by the government agents. Cemeteries owned by public institutions like schools and hospitals are taken care of by workers and agents assigned to them.

What are the effects of these attitudes and practices on environmental ethics? How does the scholar of religion engage in cemetery operation in a multi-religious and 'secular' communities as in indigenous Africa?

The data which were collected through ethnographic method are analysed using a combination of phenomenological, anthropological and sociological approaches.

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Homosexual Debate In Nigeria: A Critique Of Responses Of Public Religions

Homosexual debate has been one among many contentious issues in the Nigerian polity in recent times. The issue is centered around neo-colonialism in the guise of aids (political economy) from western economic blocs to the country. Recently the Senate, of the Federal Republic of Nigeria passed a bill on this that has been accented to by the President(into law prohibiting same sex marriages in the country). The glee that greeted the efforts of the Senate and the President was based on the notion that homosexuality is alien to Nigerian cultures and therefore should not be allowed to thrive in the country. The law came against obvious trends in the development and growth of homosexual hobs cum activities in many parts of Nigeria.

Using critical analysis as a tool of engagement, this paper seeks to appraise the homosexual debate in Nigeria within the context of its global resurgence especially as a tool of political and economic negotiation within the context of globalization. Further, it seeks to respond to the issue of cultural origin of homosexuality and determine if it could be unearthed in some Nigeria culture(s). The thesis of this paper is that s homosexuality is not alien to some Nigerian cultures but has faded into irrelevance in the colonial and post-colonial era due to the influence of Islam and Christianity.

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Assessing the Contribution, Impact and Potential of Youth-led Faith Based Organizations Towards Environmental Action in Africa

The role and contribution of faith groups and faith based organizations in offering solutions to the numerous environmental challenges on the continent, is increasingly gaining traction and recognition. More than 90 percent of the population of Africa describe themselves as either Christian or Muslim and religion. Africa is also the only continent in the world with a significantly growing youth population growing, according to statistics from the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, with about 65 percent of the total population on the continent below the age of 35 years.

Across the world, young people within the faith groups and faith based organizations engaged in environmental issues, are increasingly getting organized and making their presence and impact felt. From climate change, forest and wildlife conservation, to advocacy for green energy, young people are taking the lead to ensure that they and their children live in a better world. Young Africans are more connected to their faith than their peers in Europe or the United States where congregations have been dwindling and aging especially in the last decade.

This paper seeks to examine the beginnings, contribution and potential of two youth-led faith based organizations; the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Youth and the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESIA). While the former has global membership and scope of work, the latter is focused on creating a platform for its members on the African continent. However, both organizations have created synergies and working relationships with other environmental organizations, both within and outside the faith groups.

Despite the challenges young people in Africa experience in making their voices heard, the initiative, energy and drive already exhibited by organizations such as LWF Youth and CYNESIA can be tapped into and replicated across the continent.

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Gods in Nature, Gods at Home: Domesticating the Divine in Akan Religion (Gold Coast/Ghana) in Late Pre-Colonial Time

I will present an analysis of the material aspects of Akan notions of the meta-empirical: God, the goddess Earth and the gods as identified with (wild) nature, i.e. as the uncultivated, fear/awe-inspiring natural environment, particularly the forest, hills, rock, thunderstorms; and how the gods were domesticated. Akan religion actually has no cosmogony. Akan only have bedside stories about 'long

ago' when the sky god was said to be close to the first humans, before they knew about sex, procreation and death, and gods. I will mention this 'cosmogonic' part therefore only briefly. The emphasis of my paper will be rather on the 'post-cosmogonic' part of Akan religion, i.e. on how the gods in wild nature were domesticated. The paper aims to elucidate the intrinsic connection between (this part of) Akan religion and 'nature', conceived in modern terms as their uncultivated natural environment. It will also, however, show that this intimate connection with 'nature/the environment produced no conservationist ideology in Akan believers at the time. It had at most a few accidental side effects for the 'conservation' of 'nature'.

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A Ghanaian Reflection on Pentecostal Ethics and Genetically Modified Foods

The emergence of genetically modified (GM) foods into the environment and the food chain of humanity has become highly controversial in the most parts of the world. The likelihood that GM foods will form a large proportion of the plants grown by farmers in the world (Ghana) within the next decade has aroused reactions ranging from outrage and unease to acceptance. Ethics attempts to determine the uprightness of human behaviour by examining motives, principles and consequences of an act. Genetic engineering, one of the challenging ethical features of our brave new world, has received varied responses from the Christian community. Roman Catholic Natural Law theory rejects any level of human interference in natural processes. The pneumatic nature of Pentecostal ethics renders it rather fluid and adaptable. This article therefore sought to reflect on the Ghanaian Pentecostal Ethics on Genetically Modified Foods. Since Pentecostals comprise the most significant force in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, their position on emerging moral issues can be influential. Available scholarship on the ecological, technical, economic, and social impact of genetically modified crops was examined. The spectrum of Ghanaian Christian awareness and responses to genetic engineering have been assessed, and the position of Ghanaian Pentecostals and their capacity to contribute to a national policy on GM foods have been appreciated. Findings from the paper have given meaningful reasoning from the Pentecostal perception about genetically modified foods. This paper is a joint collaboration between two researchers.

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Traditional Spiritual Practices: Untapped Potential in Conservation Planning

Plant use in the context of traditional spiritual values can provide important information for conservation planning, such as baseline data on possibly threatened species. We documented two different restrictions implemented by local people (taboos and ritual sacrifices) related to the use of ritual plants in Benin (West Africa) and Gabon (Central Africa). We wanted to see if these restrictions reflected plant scarcity from an etic perspective (official threat status, e.g. IUCN Red List) and an emic viewpoint (perceived scarcity by local people). We conducted 102 interviews and documented 670 ritual plants. Restricted plants were significantly more often officially threatened or perceived as scarce than non-restricted plants in Benin. In Gabon, the more forested and less densely-populated of the two countries, only plants that were perceived as scarce were significantly related to restrictions. These results suggest a form of adaptive management where restrictions are related to resource scarcity of ritual plant species.

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Rain Makers, Environmental Change and Contestation of the Gods Amongst the Biali of North West Benin (West Africa)

The paper comes from a study in an area located in North-west of Benin and which is severely hit by ecological strains. It looks at the Biali ethnic group whose land chiefs and rainmakers, during special ceremonies, invoke the Gods every year to call for rain after a long dry season. At the first instance, the paper describes the social, religious and cultural functions of rainmakers and their close relationships with environment, but also the alliances and conflicts they are facing with local

populations in their roles to perpetuate or not traditions. Then it dwells on the various clans and types of representations of the totems of water in the districts of Tantéga and Matéri before explaining and analysing in depth their relationships with environmental issues. Afterwards, the paper analyses the challenge of the Gods rainmakers by the young and the questioning of traditional beliefs. Finally, it dissects the exorbitant costs (sacrifices and offerings) of the cultural and religious ceremonies related to rain calling, before closing with new reflection pathways on the links between religion, ecology and environment.

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Deuteronomy 22:6-7 and the Development of a New Paradigm for Christianity

A number of biblical scholars and theologians are currently trying to develop a new paradigm for Christianity since the old one (dubbed “the Augustinian paradigm”) focuses exclusively on human beings and their salvation. Take as an example the German theologian Jörg Zink who wrote the following: “A theology which knows nothing but the lonely family history or family tragedy between God and humankind is a thing of the past”. The Australian theologian, Nigel Leaves, endorses this and says: “The love of God must be replaced by a new-found reverence for our global home, and the task of religious people is to hand on to the following generations an integrated ecosystem in the best possible condition.” The paper will discuss Deuteronomy 22:6-7 as a text which may assist scholars in developing a new paradigm in which sustainability becomes a major focal point.

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Religion, Nature and Environmental Action from Africa to Avatar and Back

Religion and nature have always been deeply entwined. (By ‘religion’ I include but do not consider essential human perceptions regarding immaterial or extraordinary or divine forces or powers, as well as the human affective experience and their quest to find a meaningful place in the cosmos.) Religions in this broad emerge through a long process of evolution, and religious perceptions and beliefs shape human behaviors and thus habitats and evolution itself. The complex process of biocultural evolution frames in important ways the scholarly quest to understand the relationships and reciprocal influences between humans, their environments, and their religious beliefs and practices. This process is all the more multivariate when the sometimes-scientific study of religion and culture gets wrapped up in the process, when who is the subject and who is the object, and who is the researcher and who is the data, cannot be easily distinguished. As environmental concern has increased around the world and calls for dramatic environmental action have intensified, and religions are either vilified as complicit or responsible, and looked to for eco-salvation, a perception has grown that the study of the religion/nature nexus may be critical to understanding whether, and if so how humans, might adapt well to the environmental systems to which belong, which they also depend upon and always modify. Yet our understanding of the role of religion in environmental mobilization and environmental change remains confused and contested.

In this presentation I examine the best available evidence as to what sorts of affective, spiritual, and religious perceptions tend to foster dramatic environmental action. Are the world’s predominant religions turning dramatically green, as some claim? Do the wildly diverse indigenous traditions, at least where not run over by the predominant ones, offer environmentally salutary alternatives? Is a new, global, earth religion spreading around the world that, while sometimes drawing on or having affinity with longstanding religious traditions, promoting in more promising ways a salutary, human response to the global environmental crisis? More specifically, in a globalizing world, are new forms of religious production emerging that promote reverence for nature, kinship feelings, and ethics rooted in understandings of interconnection and mutual dependence? Based on historical and field research in diverse cultural contexts, including several sites in Africa, I will argue that there is reason to believe the answer is yes. Yet there is much reason for scholarly caution and to treat competing scholarly perceptions as hypotheses that require sophisticated, long-term, interdisciplinary research. And the need for such research is the reason that the still fledgling enquiry

into the complex relationships between environmental and cultural systems, including what some now construe as religion, is such a fascinating and potentially important field.

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Of God, Environmental Disasters and Punishments – A critical analysis of Selected Media Discourses

On January 12, 2010 an earthquake measuring 7 on the Richter scale happened in Haiti. About 300,000 people died in the disaster while over one million were displaced. The scale or impact of the floods that happened in the United Kingdom in January 2014 was not in any way comparable to the Haitian earthquake. However, the two environmental disasters were linked by particular interpretations that constructed them as punishments from God. Mr Pat Robertson, a foremost American televangelist, said God had used the earthquake to punish Haitians because of the pact the nation's founders formed with the Devil during their struggles for independence from France. Following the floods in the UK, councillor David Silvester of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) said God was punishing the people of Britain for their tolerance of homosexuality. For centuries humans have sought ecclesiastical explanations for cataclysmic events. In the past the dominant voices in the discourse were mostly those of religious and scientific elites. It is a more open discourse in the 21st century as religious authority wanes in some parts of the world and new media have revolutionised the public sphere by giving a voice to the many. By analysing selected new/social media discourses of the role of God in recent environmental disasters, this paper seeks to understand the influence of these debates on the construction/interpretation of religion in post-modernity. It also seeks to compare the trajectories of the debates and the dominant ideas within and among various religious traditions.

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A Cosmological Interpretation of the Old Testament: Ecological Implications

When trying to read the Old Testament with an ecological sensitivity all the problems of biblical hermeneutics are driven to the extreme. This is due to the fact that the Old Testament has very little (if anything) to say on ecological and conservation matters. At the least one could say that the Old Testament is largely indifferent towards the environment. This leaves the Old Testament exegete in the proverbial wilderness, where none of traditional interpretation methods would suffice. It is suggested that a cosmological interpretation of the Old Testament may lead Old Testament scholars out of this impasse. Such a cosmological interpretation takes the hermeneutics of Gadamer seriously, which reckons with the radical "otherness" of ancient texts such as the Old Testament. The concept of wilderness will be used as an example of how a cosmological interpretation may radically re-interpret the relevant biblical texts.

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The Landscape of Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: An Overview and an Exploration of Some of the Issues

The aim of this paper is to give an overview of extant discourses on ecological biblical hermeneutics, and to discuss some of the issues highlighted in these discourses. After a brief reflection on the term "ecological biblical hermeneutics", three prominent discourses in this field of study are discussed, namely the Earth Bible project, the Green Bible project, and a project at the University of Exeter on Uses of the Bible in Environmental Ethics. A number of individual voices, especially from the African continent, will also be heard, including perspectives offered by Samson Gitau, Madipoane Masenya, Jesse Mugambi and Tharcisse Gatwa. The paper concludes with a brief exploration of the tensions between, but also possible mutual enrichment of perspectives and approaches associated with the various discourses on ecological biblical hermeneutics. The other four panellists will shed more light onto, or explore in more depth, some of the issues highlighted in this paper.

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The work of the Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians on Gender, Ecology and Religion: Taking Stock and Exploring the Way Forward

This paper will follow the work that the Circle of Concerned African Woman members have done so far regarding their exploration and reflection on the practical ways in which (Southern) African women contribute towards the sustenance and care of the ecology; and by doing so, towards the livelihoods and socio-cultural cohesion of their families and communities, as well as towards the upkeep of their religious and cultural spirituality and values. This will take us back to the earlier contributions of South African and African woman religious scholars to international eco-feminist and eco-theological publications, to contributions of women theologians in Southern African and international journals, as well as to some of the dissertations and theses written by members of the Circle in this regard. The question will be asked whether members of the Circle have given enough attention to the relationship between religion, ecology and women; within a broader study of the interdependence between ecology and human communities, as this relates to the sustainable livelihoods of families and communities; the sustenance and protection of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, religious practices and cultural values which bring (or brought) together Southern African communities and ecosystems in a holistic world view; in the face of the rape of African “natural resources” through colonial and post-colonial agriculture, land ownership, mining and development – also under post-independence governments. Was this exploration of ecology, women and their cultural-religious practices ever considered to be a main item on the agenda of the Circle? If this was not the case, why not? Are members of the Circle now becoming more aware of the importance of this area of study?

This paper will also explore the way forward. Some of the possible themes that need exploration, are:

- Dialogue / partnership between African woman eco-theologians in the academy and African grassroots women and activists.
- Dialogue between African woman eco-theologians, and ecofeminist theologians of the South and of the rest of the globe.
- Dialogue between African woman eco-theologians and other African woman scholars in the fields of, e.g., ecological studies, the “natural” sciences, development studies, agriculture, sociology and anthropology.
- Dialogue between African women eco-theologians and African as well as international networks and movements for ecological and social re-integration, recovery and justice.
- What could be the results of such explorations? Could it empower African women theologians in partnership with grassroots and activist women to contribute towards a sustainable future for their specific communities and ecosystems, in a time of global warming? Could African women theologians in partnership with their “grassroots” sisters be agents in the recovery of a holistic African way of life which treasures both ecology and community? Finally, could African women – whether they are theologians and scholars of religion, community workers and activists, or political and government leaders, become leaders in the world-wide ecological movement?

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The Psychology of Animal Companionship: Some Modern and Ancient Views

All living things are interconnected in the web of life. We experience our sharing of the web of life *inter alia* with our interaction with our companion animals (dogs, cats, horses, etc.), and markedly in the intuitive sensing of some mental overlap between ourselves and them. Psychology has shown that companion animals provide us with social and emotional support as if they were “fellow humans.” We in turn ensure their survival as species even if it is through anthropomorphic selection. An important question is, what does this mental overlap comprise – do they (at least some animals) share with us a “theory of mind” (mindreading of others’ thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs), traditionally regarded as uniquely human, or is their intentional stance on a less sophisticated level? Moving from modern ruminations on human and non-human animals’ mental lives to ancient views, it is interesting that we find an appreciation of the social supportive value of animal companions in a

number of biblical references (e.g. 2 Sam 12:3 "...the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb...it was like a daughter to him"). The anthropomorphizing of animals point to the same intuitive sense of their enhancing of our psychosocial well-being, even from this ancient pre-scientific era. What the ancients "knew," modern science has put on more solid and empirical grounds.

Being "related" to our animal companions and the wider web of life implies an ethic of care towards the natural world.

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Harvesting in Nature's Dispensary: Traditional Healers, the Muthi Trade and the Intractable Relationship With Witchcraft in South Africa Today

Consistent with the holistic and animistic African worldview, traditional medicine preparations, known as muthi, are recognised not merely for their ability to heal physical afflictions, but equally for their meta-physical potencies in addressing social and psychic misfortune. This paper will focus on the complexities of the muthitrade in South Africa today through a review of colonial witchcraft legislation that, in subjecting many African beliefs and practices to the historical western binary distinction between religion and magic, directly targeted the diagnostic and healing skills of diviners and herbalists (Traditional Healers) in harnessing the medicinal and magical properties recognised to inhere in plants, animal parts and minerals. Discussion of current attempts to amend witchcraft legislation will illustrate the degree to which the preparation and dispensing of muthi evolved from within personal healer-client relationships into a highly competitive and contested multi-million rand industry that has burgeoned alongside rapidly changing witchcraft discourses in South Africa. I will therefore argue that themuthi industry today reflects the deeper concerns in our society and exacerbates the inability of Traditional Healers to extricate themselves from involvement in unrelenting witchcraft-related concerns as social and spiritual insecurities continue to escalate. In so doing, I will raise questions of moral intentionality in the muthiindustry with particular emphasis on the environmental impact and on the disturbing and growing phenomenon of harvesting human body parts for inclusion in muthi preparations.

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Eating and Drinking in an AIC: Measurements and Recipes for Social Capital

The questions of how social capital is measured as well as how it is generated have both received a lot of attention in recent years. This paper is an attempt at making a modest contribution towards addressing these issues, and specifically also as a contribution from the fields of Liturgical Studies. It is argued that commensality can be taken as both lens/barometer with regards to the presence or absence of social capital as well as being a potential generator of social capital. In order to arrive at this conclusion regarding food and the eating habits of humankind, the phenomenon of commensality and its relation to social capital is approached here from three different angles, namely Social Anthropology, New Testament Studies and Ethnography.

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From Genesis to Jonah: Biblical Resources for Environmental Justice

Contextual Bible Study is a methodology that has emerged out of the struggle against apartheid, closely associated with the Latin American 'popular reading of the Bible' movement. This methodology has been 'redeployed' since liberation in South Africa in to a range of other sites of struggle, including gender, HIV, the economy, disability, and the environment. In recent years the institutional base for this methodology, the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research (UKZN), has been invited to work with local communities around land and environmental issues. Our work is people-centred, so this paper explores how Contextual Bible Study (an emancipatory practice) works with the environment as a 'site of struggle', in the quest for holistic justice, including environmental justice, for the poor and marginalised. The paper will consider two

examples of our work, one from a 'text of terror' with respect to the environment, Genesis 1, and the other a little known text from the book of Jonah. The Genesis text opens up space to deal with ecological issues in general terms, and the Jonah text opens up more specific space to engage with South Africa's (and Africa's) 'cattle-cultures'.

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The Impact of Apartheid on Environmentalism and (Eco) Feminism

This paper argues that the apartheid system has had a detrimental effect on the contemporary relationships between the land and society in South Africa. In addition, it argues that the socio-economic disparities within South Africa that developed from racial segregationist policies demonstrate how different classes in society understand and associate with the environment. The apartheid system has legitimized racial segregation through religious interpretation in order to promote racial superiority. Through this practice, the right to land has been embedded within a narrative of not only racial validation but also religious privilege. In the present context the struggle for land has been used by the disadvantaged as a measure of economic right and not less as a source of spiritual or communal connectivity. Likewise, the living spaces of the poor in South Africa have removed any sense of non-material connection to the land given that the environment is plagued by socio-economic and ecological problems as well as negative historical sentiment that obstructs the environment from being viewed as sacred. In this light, this paper explores the ways in which local non-governmental organizations, such as SALT and SAFCEI can contribute (or not) to the emergence of ecofeminist views on the liberation of women and nature amongst disenfranchised people.