Abstracts:

A Retreating Goddess? Conflicting Perceptions of Ecological Change near the Gangotri-Gaumukh Glacier

Georgina Drew
India China Institute, The New School

The Gangotri-Gaumukh glacier is a significant body of ice in the Indian Himalayas whose loss could cause ecological turmoil, the disruption of livelihoods, and possibly even threaten the continuity of cultural-religious practices intertwined with the sacred Ganga River into which its runoff flows. Although there is reason to fear for the Ganga's longevity, the issue of its potential decline is layered with ambiguity, uncertainty, and debate. In this article, I present the science-based discourse on glacial melt, which continues to evolve, along with ethnographically documented perspectives on retreating glaciers and other ecological transformations. I demonstrate how Faith in the enduring nature of the Goddess Ganga impacts interpretations of environmental change, regardless of the climate change science, and how ideas about the river's impermanence in Hindu texts can sometimes deter conservation efforts. In doing so I offer a variety of views that enlarge discussions about the causes for and the range of responses to climatic change.

Religion and Climate Change in Northern Kenya: New Moral Frameworks for New Environmental Challenges?

Elizabeth E. Watson, Hassan Hussein Kochore

In the arid lands of northern Kenya, the pastoralist livelihoods of Boran and Gabra peoples are already under pressure from environmental changes that are increasingly perceived as related to climate change. Indigenous religions, different forms of Christianity, and Islam all co-exist in this region; each potentially has a role to play in responding to the environmental crisis. Our research suggests that indigenous religions provide a valuable and integrated set of institutions that could potentially facilitate adaptation to climate change. In contrast, the Abrahamic religions have not explicitly engaged with climate change. Moreover, through their relief and development work they have indirectly undermined many of the qualities of mobile pastoralism that might enable herders to cope with more unpredictable weather in future. Noting that religions appear to be playing a powerful role in the region, we argue that the subject deserves greater attention among scholars of climate change.
'Healing the Land' in the Canadian Arctic:
Evangelism, Knowledge, and Environmental Change

Noor Johnson
Department of Anthropology, McGill University

Beginning in 2006, an evangelical movement called 'Healing the Land' was introduced to a number of Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic. Healing the Land (HTL), which promoted an ethic of environmental stewardship through prayer and repentance of sin, also helped Inuit make sense of rapid environmental change. Rather than linking shifts in weather and plant and animal distributions to climate change, HTL leaders argued that they resulted from communal processes of prayer and repentance that miraculously restored the environment to an Edenic state of plenty. In this article, I explore the appeal of HTL's theology and ritual practice to Inuit residents of Clyde River, Nunavut. I argue that residents found HTL's explanations of environmental change compelling because HTL offered a vision of integrated action through which individuals and communities could address social and environmental issues simultaneously.

Religion and Climate Change in Northern Kenya:
New Moral Frameworks for New Environmental Challenges?

Elizabeth E. Watson
Cambridge University, Department of Geography

In the arid lands of northern Kenya, the pastoral livelihoods of Boran and Gabra peoples are already under pressure from environmental changes that are increasingly perceived as related to climate change. Indigenous religions, different forms of Christianity, and Islam all co-exist in this region; each potentially has a role to play in responding to the environmental crisis. Our research suggests that indigenous religions provide a valuable and integrated set of institutions that could potentially facilitate adaptation to climate change. In contrast, the Abrahamic religions have not explicitly engaged with climate change. Moreover, through their relief and development work they have indirectly undermined many of the qualities of mobile pastoralism that might enable herders to cope with more unpredictable weather in future. Noting that religions appear to be playing a powerful role in the region, we argue that the subject deserves greater attention among scholars of climate change.
Of Rice and Men: Climate Change, Religion, and Personhood among the Diola of Guinea-Bissau

Joanna Davidson  
Department of Anthropology, Boston University

When Diola Christians participated in their male initiation rites despite missionary objections, the argument was framed in theological terms. But Diola actions regarding this and other religious practices can only be understood within the wider frame of ecological changes that have challenged not only their agrarian livelihoods but their very conceptions of personhood and processes of socialization. Given the decline in rain, Diola males can no longer 'become men' in the rice paddies. By drawing out connections among Diola agrarian culture, ideals of masculinity, current environmental conditions, and missionary pressures, I argue that this incident—and, by implication, religious change more broadly—must be appreciated not only for its theological significance within Diola agrarian culture, but as enmeshed in contemporary dynamics of climate change.

The articles described above are available for download here. Current and past issues of the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* are included in memberships to the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture. The ISSRNC is a community of scholars engaged in critical, interdisciplinary inquiry into the relationships between human beliefs, practices and environments. Scholars interested in these relationships are cordially invited to join the society, attend its conferences, and submit work for possible publication in the journal. For more information see [www.religionandnature.com](http://www.religionandnature.com).