

Negotiating concepts of nature and future in Africa

June 19-21, 2014

Conference of the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies
University of Bayreuth

Climate change debate and the concept of national parks are exports from the Western culture, imposed as part of colonial and postcolonial Africa. Based on the epistemic division of the world into the spheres of “nature” and “culture”; both concepts represent manifestations of the dichotomist divide characterizing “modern” thinking since the time of enlightenment. In order to preserve “nature” Westerns envision an undisturbed natural dynamics, e.g. an atmosphere undisturbed by anthropogenic greenhouse emissions or ecosystems undisturbed by humans.

We are interested in how different stakeholders in national parks as well as participants in the climate change debate conceptualize their respective notions of “nature” and their roles in preserving nature for the future.

The conference is an activity of the Research Project “Future Africa – Visions in Time” of the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies. More information about Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies: www.bayreuth-academy.uni-bayreuth.de

Conference Venue

University of Bayreuth, building GW I, room S91

From central station by taxi 10min, by bus to “audimax” 25 min, by feet 25 min





Thursday, June 19th 2014

1.30 pm **Arrival and coffee**

2.30 pm **Session 1: Opening**

Welcome and introduction to the conference

We are interested in different epistemologies and cosmologies with regard to human-environment relations. Nature is often assigned conflicting meanings: e.g. as a source of variability, change and innovation as well as a source of continuity and robustness. Examples occur in contestations of different ideas of “nature” especially in national parks, in climate change debates and in the recent scientific debate on ecosystem services.

Michael Hauhs and other organizers of the conference

Visions of Nature: Concepts of Appropriating and Conserving Nature in Africa

3.30 pm **Coffee break**

4 pm **Session 2: Presentations**

Nature in the context of African national parks

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, national parks are separated from humans. 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, like the growing season 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’.

Chair: *Georg Klute*

Echi Christina Gabbert, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale

Globalizing environments in the lowlands of Southern Ethiopia

Jan Erik Steinkrüger, University of Bonn

Geographical Imaginations of Africa. The (re-)production of “African“ landscapes.

Lauren Dyll-Mykklebust, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, SA

Negotiating nature - culture relationships in social change partnerships: observations from the Kalahari

7.30 pm **Dinner**



Friday, June 20th 2014

9.30 am **Session 3: Preliminary conclusions**

Cross cutting themes of concepts of nature and future

The modern position in which humans regard themselves as evolved by, but separated from nature is beset by conceptual problems, also when addressing human-environment relationships. In this section the epistemic basis for inconsistencies in the modern world view are entered from a philosophical perspective. Here we also want to discuss the questions raised by the preceding panels on climate change and national parks.

Chair: *Detlef Müller-Mahn, University of Bonn*

Nikolaus Schareika, University of Göttingen

Summarizing statement on negotiating concepts of nature and future in Africa

12 am **Lunch**

1 pm **Session 4: Presentations**

Religious dimensions of human-nature relations

Natural phenomena have been given religious or secular meaning. Differences in such interpretations correspond to characteristic attitudes religious communities form local to global scale. Historical changes in attitudes towards nature and the human environment also characterize epochs, i.e. in former "grand narratives". Here we look at parallels between religious views and the current debates about environmental change and nature preservation.

Chairs: *Ulrich Berner, Kupakwashe Mtata, University of Bayreuth*

Liz Watson, University of Cambridge

Indigenous environmental management practices embedded in local narratives of climate change

Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, University of Zimbabwe, Harare

Environmentalism and African traditional religion

Kupakwashe Mtata, University of Bayreuth

Stakeholder cosmologies at Matobo National Park, Zimbabwe

4 pm **Coffee break**



4.30 pm **Session 5: Presentations**

Climate adaptation as travelling idea

The international adaptation debate is built on the ideas of a manageable future and of a socio-ecological transformation from climate risks to sustainable development and resilient ecosystems through adaptation measures. These ideas were transferred into African national adaptation programs and projects, which are strongly related to national development policies and parameters of international adaptation funds. Several international institutions and NGO were involved in this translation process. The session is focused on scale-relations, the construction of nature in scientific and indigenous climate knowledge and traditional adaptation practices, and the understanding of progress, development, and stability within climate and adaptation policy in Africa.

Chair: *Kristina Dietz, Free University Berlin*

Detlef Müller-Mahn, University of Bonn

Geographies of the future: navigating through risky territories

Sybille Bauriedl, University of Bayreuth

Climate adaptation discourses and rescaling practices

Shuaib Lwasa, Makerere University

Localizing climate change

8 pm **Dinner**

Saturday, June 21st 2014

9.30 am **Session 6: conference conclusions**

(Re-)Conceptualizing African nature and future

Lessons learnt from the conference and further questions.

Chair: *tba*

1.30 pm **End of conference**