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HUMAN-ENVIRONMENTAL RELATIONS AND AFRICAN NATURES EDITORIAL

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Today, modernity has reached a global scale. In its early stages, it was mainly characterised by its *spatial* perspective, thereby reducing time to a dependent feature. Here, we use reflexivity as a unifying concept throughout modernity. From the perspective of the sciences of "culture," the contemporary human impact on the environment at the global scale is an expression of both "reflexive modernization" (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994) and the reflexivity of "moderns" resulting from it. When dealing with global environmental issues the natural sciences address "reflexivity" as "mechanisms of feedback," for example, in global cycles of elements. Geoscientists are using the term Anthropocene in order to designate the current geological epoch. In the Anthropocene, human beings acquired a role similar to geological, long-term forces such as plate tectonics or volcanic eruptions. The academic public beyond the geosciences has also taken up the notion of the Anthropocene quite enthusiastically. Thus, the notion of the Anthropocene allows us to bring the cultural and the natural sciences' discourses into a dialogue.

This more general debate involving sciences of nature *and* culture evolves around the question of how to conceive the relations between human beings and the environment. The notion of the Anthropocene opens the possibility for a paradigmatic shift in our perception of these relations: reflexive "moderns" may perceive themselves as being part of nature and nature as part of them. The notion of the Anthropocene as such, however, does not necessarily imply this paradigmatic shift; it can also be accommodated in a mainstream natural science perspective where man is one among other factors affecting the environment, which is conceptualised as a system, indicated by the widespread usage of terms like disturbance, force, state, etc. This is the reason why biodiversity preservations, for instance, still may well be organised within the nature-culture dichotomy paradigm.

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On the other hand, there are numerous approaches overcoming this dichotomy, theoretically as well as practically. We conjecture that wilderness is an appropriate and timely topic where these competing (or complementary?) interpretations and concepts of human-environment relations can be exemplified and tested.

Likewise, the notion of the Anthropocene entails the perception of a threshold in time. We seem to be the last generation that can think of nature as "wilderness" or as pristine. It is obvious that our decisions which nature to conserve will affect "wilderness experiences" of future generations. Thus, in the Anthropocene notions such as "nature" may turn into paradoxes. A "nature" left to itself (such as core zones in national parks) may change fast due to past or subtle changes already brought about by humans. Other "wild natures," which are actively restored or maintained as replicas of a historical situation resembling pre-human contact, are easily perceived as artificial: they do not appear as authentic. Nature and culture are no longer perceived as spatially separated spheres. Wilderness and nature have become a part of human civilisation which can be installed and performed whenever needed. Nature and culture become completely entangled through and in such performances.

Until recently, modernity was characterised by the perception of a linear time, expressed on a discursive level as (social, economic, etc.) progress of the cultural sphere. The idea of progress, however, also has a critical side. Progress in the cultural sphere seems to always insinuate alienation both from the "inner nature" of humans and from the outer sphere of the environment. Moderns thus struggle to preserve biodiversity, with the aim of "saving" last spots of pristine or wild nature from the disturbing effects of progress. They do so mostly without noticing that both projects of modernity, i.e., progress and conservation, have become incompatible with one another. Progress rhymes with change, protection with preservation. What they share as projects of modernity, though, is the missionary fervour with which they are often pursued (Latour 2017). Today's nature conservationists show a similar conviction that their mission is to "save the world" just as nineteenth-century colonialists showed when they spread out into the world in order to fulfill their "civilising mission," as the French put it, and to bring progress and civilisation to the still uncivilised rest of the world.

Demarcating nature's space from human space shall enable "nature" to follow its "own" dynamic and evolutionary course in time. It is most remarkable, though, that the protection of nature is organised mainly spatially; conservationists seem to be convinced that the management of space, i.e., the delineation and fencing of protected areas, will imply the mastering of linear time. Compared with the history of the largest human empire, the British Empire, the current size and intended growth of terrestrial protected areas (United Nations, Millennium Development Goal 11) resembles British rule from about 1860 (Marchetti and Ausubel 2012). Power over humans and over "nature" is still measured in terms of area; with space being regarded as the "most effective tool in halting the biodiversity crisis" (Montesino-Pouzols et al. 2014).

In this sense, the project of modernity has recently taken a *temporal* turn. The current debate on human-environmental relations seems to strongly indicate that the spatial categorisation of the world into a cultural and a natural realm has lost much of its analytic and heuristic value. The dichotomy – here culture, there nature – appears to have become as obsolete as other Cartesian dichotomies so dear to us and on which Western intellectuality, societal division of labour and indeed scientific thinking, is based. It is noteworthy that the attempts to overcome familiar dichotomies are no longer limited to the sole academic realm (for an early example regarding the nature-culture dichotomy, see Descola and Pálsson 1996), but have reached the wider public.

Here, we propose an approach that focuses on time and specifies ecosystem management goals in a language of temporal logic. If one only thinks of the epistemic aspects of "nature," the biological inner nature of humans is experienced as health, outer nature as wilderness. The starting point of our reflection is the degree to which humans are able to communicate, dissent or agree about shared experiences. Documenting and repeating values attached to shared experiences can be regarded as "culture."

In as much as modern media and technology have contributed to the hybridisation of nature and its articulation with culture, they have also opened up new epistemic possibilities. The above question became transposed into "How can wilderness be (sustainably) performed and

experienced among moderns?" Considering zoos and national parks primarily as media offering wilderness experiences, their services appear as ends in a continuum. Both serve the same goal: providing experiences that a civilisation values as worth preserving.

Within the epistemic of a spatial delineation of "Nature–Culture," values are treated as external to the understanding of a system. In the current self-referential, reflexive situation this epistemic no longer appears appropriate. Being systematic and democratic about shared values has become a key issue today. Understanding and predicting ecosystems, based on the theory of dynamic systems (from physics), may be asking too much from scientists in the era of the Anthropocene.

The central task will thus be to organise and continue the history of human-environment interfaces in such a way that they deserve the notion "sustainable." The testing criterion is that experiences, currently valued as worthwhile preserving, remain possible options for a similar, and "authentic," valuation by future generations, under the restriction, however, that damages are avoided. But how to perpetuate such a knowledge and its associated value bundle for future generations? This is certainly not achieved by trusting only the permanence as a dynamic system, as in the tradition of the natural sciences, but by maintaining skilled interaction at the interface. The human-environment relation at such interfaces may rather resemble the *interactive* (or resonant, Rosa 2016) character of best practices in e.g. hunting, gardening, forestry, husbandry rather than the passive attitude of an objective, detached observer in the natural science tradition.

We believe that such trends can actually be observed in the conservation of nature in Africa and elsewhere, but our examples from Africa seem to provide us with particular clear cases. Putting these issues into sharp focus may help to overcome the disciplinary gap between scientists and scholars.

About the Contributions

The joint article by modeller Michael Hauhs, computer scientist Baltasar Trancón y Widemann and anthropologist Georg Klute states

that modern human-environment relations are problematic and difficult to analyse in terms of nature and culture. The anthropologist Philippe Descola has suggested to abandon and overcome the nature-culture dichotomy in order to reorganise the academic division of labour, not only in environmental questions. To this end, he surveyed the empirical evidence of patterns in human-environmental relations, suggesting four abstract cosmologies. His framework is difficult to translate outside anthropology. In this paper a translation into a modelling terminology is proposed, which is compatible with the formalisation of programmes in computer science. The generalised framework contains four ideal types of modelling paradigms of modern subjects. Three typical disciplinary perspectives result by adding metaphysical, incompatible simplifications to this scheme. The generalised framework of models can be tested on various other classification schemes in a number of disciplines. In each application, the categories of classification can be translated into a modelling terminology and then the patterns of the four logical types can be compared with the phenomenology for each case. Implications for interdisciplinary cooperation between science and humanities are sketched for some environmental issues. The article demonstrates how tools from computer science can help, metaphorically, conceptually and technically, to organise interdisciplinary exchange between science and the humanities. The categorical approach of applying the "divide and conquer" technique to different disciplinary models serves as a yardstick for comparing the implicit logic and modelling assumptions across examples whose phenomenological contents appear as unrelated. It gives useful hints how a dilemma of choosing between rigorous or relevant models can be resolved (e.g., in environmental science) and how the nature-culture dilemma can be replaced by a general modelling framework of few model types.

Kupakwashe Mtata also takes Descola's four types of cosmologies as a starting point for his analysis, this time from the perspective of religious studies. Descola suggested a scheme to enumerate dispositions to nature in such a way as to take into account non-Western practices that tend to be overshadowed by the dominance of naturalism. He also deployed this scheme to account for other religious types in the world, which in a similar manner tend to be obscured by Western Christianity. Mtata's article examines Descola's ontological scheme in the light of the case of the Mwali cult at the Matobo Hills

World Heritage Site in Zimbabwe. Data gathered through a protracted period of participant observation and interviews in the Matobo Hills seem to indicate that instead of the fourfold scheme Descola proposes, Mtata's reference to incarnation and figuration is a more promising avenue to account for religious forms and the various ways humans relate to their environments.

Anthropologist Tilman Musch leads the reader to the Sahara where petrified footprints of now extinct megafauna and those of humans in the mud of the former lake Agadem may symbolise the beginning of an epoch dominated by man. How can such a "local" Anthropocene be defined? In eastern Niger, two aspects seem particularly important to answer this question. The first is the disappearance of the addax antelope in the context of the megafauna extinction. The second is the question, how the "natural" environment may be conceived among the local Teda while the "Western" discussion is now highlighting the "hybridity" of space.

In their joint article the anthropologists Asebe Regassa and Georg Klute and the geographer Mohammed Detona take the enclosure and commodification processes of "nature" one step beyond a political economy perspective conceptualising them from ontological notions of nature-culture relations. Taking the enclosure for large-scale commercial agriculture and game reserve in northeastern Ethiopia as a case, the paper argues that enclosure and nature commodification are part of neoliberal environmental governance that has been built on the notion of subduing "nature" as well as subaltern groups to the power of capitalism. More specifically, while the economic and political dimensions of these processes are salient, the ontological notions of the nature-culture dualism have been invoked by several states in their justification of expropriating pastoralist lands, thus nullifying indigenous people's claims to ancestral homelands. The data for this paper was collected from 2013 to 2016 through ethnographic fieldwork, mainly conducted by Mohammed Detona and occasionally by Georg Klute and Asebe Regassa. The findings show oscillating perceptions of human-environment relations among the Afar pastoralists: from human-environment, conjointly constituted by humans and non-humans, to the utilitarian dualist approach of environmental use that is mainly caused by the infiltration of capitalist economy and state driven development and conservation projects.

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