

## CALL FOR PAPERS

# Perspectives and challenges in nature-society interrelationships through religious and spiritual experiences

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Some of the central issues proposed by UNESCO in the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the protection, administration, and sustainability of biodiversity (natural resources) in reserves, biospheres, and geoparks, as well as the care of maritime resources, such as oceans, coasts, and water security, in general. In addition to the growing concern about climate change and global warming, to address the above, actions have been outlined for the design, co-management, and construction of public policies to preserve the environment. Thus, natural systems have been linked to four components (symbolic, ecological, economic, and political) in which a series of aspects associated with paradigms of interdisciplinarity circulate regarding the conservation of socio-biodiverse settings. These ideas can be considered—among other possibilities—dialogues from the perspective of cultural ecology and political ecology that propose the care and use of the environment as a living and reciprocal system. These discussions emphasize the construction of territories and maritories as spaces of interaction and ecosystem relationships.

From a post-constructivist perspective, Tim Ingold understands the human-non-human relationship as a process of *togetherness* where living together refers to the existence of worlds connected by eco-spiritual visions. Based on this, nature is conceived as a *socio-natural body* in which different knowledge aspects converge, allowing for the correlation of nature, natural resources, and human beings. These issues are not exempt from discrepancies when considering the care of nature, natural spaces, and all that inhabits them. Such scenarios become promising avenues for dialogue and decision-making regarding the design of public policies for environmental management and conservation.

People's connections with nature are mediated by different dimensions: cultural, historical, political, social, and religious, among others. Thus, some religious and spiritual expressions emphasize resource management through subjectivities that imply a consensual and balanced vision of nature and the environment, e.g., the Concheros dance in Mexico, the ceremonies of feeding the land within Afro-inspired religious traditions originating in Cuba, or payments to the land made by the indigenous communities in Santa Marta's Sierra Nevada, in Colombia.

Religious or spiritual manifestations are understood here not as epiphenomenal aspects of everyday life but, on the contrary, as experiences that have centrality and incidence in all spheres of human action.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the social, natural, and transcendent worlds—which are not separated in all societies—converge and affect the ways in which people inhabit these universes; thus, the interconnections and approximations between humans–non-humans–nature are reconfigured. These ways of being in the world sometimes translate into practices that can be conflictive for one or another population group, as they come into tension with the dispositions of the dominant society and with organizations in the world that defend wildlife and animal rights. Let us consider, for example, the Gadhimai festival in Nepal, where thousands of buffaloes and other animal species are sacrificed; sacrifices in many Afro-inspired religions in the diaspora across the planet; although less controversial, the religious practices of animals sacrificed for consumption under the Jewish law known as *kosher*; or the consumption of endangered species such as hicotéa turtles during the Holy Week, as part of the ancestral gastronomic traditions of the Sinu region in the Colombian Caribbean.

This dossier aims to understand how different religious and spiritual experiences affect the relationships of human beings with nature in the contemporary world. Far from being a unidirectional relationship, it is understood that these religious

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1 For a greater openness in the discussion of the thematic issue proposed here, we have chosen to speak not only of religious systems or religions—in their connection to nature—but also of religious and spiritual expressions and experiences. With this, we seek to accommodate dynamics that do not necessarily have a religious institutional character and/or specialization.

experiences are affected simultaneously by the dissimilar variations of the socio-cultural, socio-historical, socio-natural, and socio-geographical environments in which they are installed. Why this invitation to think about the relationships between nature, religions, beliefs, and spiritualities in the contemporary world? While discourses on nature, climate change, and the preservation of the environment and renewable and non-renewable resources have become global, there has also been a boom in studies concerned with religious phenomena and spiritualities and have questioned how they affect the everyday life of human beings. As mentioned earlier, the interconnections between these two dynamics are not free of tensions, even more so when we consider that both provide conceptions that do not always coincide about nature, the presence of human beings, and their relationship with it. These two social phenomena give rise to public policy issues that are sometimes not clearly established and require study from a border perspective.

These problems are exacerbated by migratory—transnational and national— processes across the globe that influence the reappropriations and rearrangements of spiritualities in their places of reception. How to think of religious and spiritual manifestations, precisely in their connection with nature, when they are also in permanent movement and go beyond the original borders? In other words, if different religious manifestations interweave human–non-human–nature relationships, in which people are inscribed from the moment of birth, and territorialization exercises are co-created with them, which give rise, for example, to natural and religious sanctuaries, how are the relationships of different religiosities and spiritualities with a new natural environment re-signified? Scenes of offerings made to various spiritualities in rivers, seas, mountains, or urban environments are increasingly frequent in Europe and North and South America with the arrival of Afro-inspired religious practices from Brazil or Cuba. These offerings can be seen as part of ancestral traditions and communion with nature but also as dynamics of environmental pollution.

In this way, if we accept, at least partially, that conceptions of nature are socially, culturally, and historically constructed and that, thus, they are dynamic and transformed according to local and global logics, and we also recognize that religious and spiritual phenomena, rather than symbolic manifestations, become real power over inhabited worlds, a range of relevant questions arises that allows broadening our understanding of nature-culture relations today. For example, how are conceptions of environmental justice interconnected with ontological positions on nature and religion? How do religious and economic-extractivist logics conflict and dispute a place of know-how and relationship with the natural world? How are environmental problems such as resource scarcity, climate change, natural disasters, and pandemics perceived and faced by one or other actors? In this regard, it is possible to find experiences worldwide; for example, the Wayuu indigenous communities of La Guajira in Colombia,

their relationship with the management of natural resources such as water, and their struggles against coal extraction by multinationals; the ancestral and spiritual traditions of indigenous communities north of San Juan in Argentina and their resistance to mega-mining practices; the interrelationships with non-human entities of the Q'ero in the Peruvian Andes as options to address climate change; or the Buddhist environmental movements in Thailand that oppose deforestation and biodiversity loss as a consequence of the development of state projects.

This dossier aims to contribute to the necessary transdisciplinary dialogue between conceptions around nature, renewable and non-renewable resources, and climate change, among others, developed from different sectors of societies, which may come into tension with practices, spiritual beliefs, and modes of relating that conceive the natural world in ways that are dissimilar from those of dominant societies governed by developmental economic or scientific and technocratic logics. Given the dramatic changes experienced throughout the planet, it seems timely to examine approaches aimed at weaving transcultural conversations that rethink and find alternatives to make viable the permanence of all living beings in the world we inhabit.

Thus, the dossier is committed to an inter-trans-disciplinary dialogue that considers, from different theoretical-methodological approaches, the relationships woven between diverse religious systems and experiences with nature. In this sense, we expect experience-based analytical and interpretative proposals that connect to theory-practice, as well as theoretical analyses that start from concrete social dynamics; these studies should advance in the discussions and interpretations within this field from the social, human, and natural sciences. Therefore, the dossier is open to contributions from ecology, anthropology, archaeology, medicine, architecture, sociology, psychology, law, economics, history, geography, politics, and cultural, literary, and artistic studies. This wide disciplinary range implies that the social dynamics to be discussed have a level of complexity whose understanding is not exhausted in one or another theoretical or methodological approach.

## **Thematic strands**

- Environmental justice and religious practices
- Environmental relations and religious diasporas
- Natural sanctuaries and sacred architectures
- Religious-spiritual practices and environmental conservation
- Public policies around nature and religious and spiritual traditions
- Nature and religious-therapeutic relationships

- Transnational markets of nature and spiritualities
- Natural disasters and coping through religious experience

This thematic issue is open to proposals—written in Spanish, English, and Portuguese—that are not necessarily limited to the axes indicated here but that, in some way, deal with other issues associated with the problem of religious and spiritual experiences related to nature–society relations. Likewise, it welcomes contributions that work on diverse religious or spiritual traditions or systems, including indigenous cosmogonies, Afro-inspired, Judeo-Christian, Islamic, Hinduist, and Buddhist religions, among others.

**Keywords:** environmental relations, human-non-human relationships, nature, nature-culture, religious and spiritual expressions