



Domesticating, Rewilding,
Sacralizing: Modes of Engaging
Nature in Everyday Life

presented by



TEMERTY
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HARVARD
UNIVERSITY



THE WORKING GROUP ON
LIVED RELIGION IN EASTERN
EUROPE AND EURASIA

November 1-2 2023



Given growing ecological crises driven by climate change and the Russo-Ukrainian war, this workshop brings together the insights of animal studies, environmental humanities, and the anthropology of religion to rethink how interrelatedness, hierarchies of obligations, and communities of care might be changing at this critically important historical juncture.

The rise of multispecies ethnography has heightened our awareness of the astounding diversity of human-nonhuman relationships and sharpened our understanding as to how human and non-human animals affect each other's lives. This turn in anthropological research to move beyond the human suggests that moral acts of empathy, stewardship, and responsibility for the natural world should increasingly be framed as an interspecies endeavor and studied accordingly.

Anthropologists of religion have long recognized the role of nonhuman agents in shaping everyday life. Plants and animals figure prominently in religious iconography and reflect the import of human-nonhuman interactions in the formation of beliefs, practices, and what is held to be sacred. The powers of deities are often represented in natural elements, and animals and plants are often understood as manifestations of otherworldly power and presence.

By combining consideration of how the natural world affects otherworldly experiences and multispecies ethnography, this workshop aims to come to a greater understanding of the dynamics that continue to shape human experience. The presentations that are part of this workshop explore the material and symbolic ways in which the natural world is domesticated, rewilded, and generates transcendence; the aesthetics and poetics of human interactions with sacralized elements of nature; and how such processes and encounters between the natural and supernatural worlds inform the formation of communities and the bonds that sustain them.

Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute
Omeljan Pritsak Memorial Library
34 Kirkland Street
Cambridge, MA

This is an in-person event with the possibility to join online. Zoom Webinar registration:
https://harvard.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_NFMcVfnjRPeLWbxEN5XqLg

10:00 Welcome and Introductory Remarks

Catherine Wanner, Pennsylvania State University and Working Group on Lived Religion in Eastern Europe and Eurasia

Emily Channell-Justice, Director, Temerty Contemporary Ukraine Program, Harvard Ukrainian Institute

Chair: John Vsetecka, Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute

10:15 Trees as Allies

Ketevan Gurchiani, Ilia State University (online)

Trees can afford to be sacred, vulnerable, and resistant at the same time. In the 1920s, with the efforts of local botanists, conservation laws were introduced in Soviet Georgia that protected certain trees, such as lime trees, zelkovas or pine trees. The sacral function of some trees merged with the environmental ideas. Other trees, important because of their old age, became quasi-saints because of the importance they acquired for everyday resistance practices. These practices were used for the preservation of private spaces in the Soviet period and for the preservation of public spaces in the cities of today's Georgia. The talk explores how the merging of the sacred, personal, and botanical turned trees into allies in the everyday practices of resistance and how this is still used as a hidden form of resistance in Tbilisi today.

Respondent: Daria Storoshchuk, Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute

11:00 The Forest Church and Greek Catholic Pilgrimage on the Grounds of Hope

Julia Buyskykh, University College Cork (online)

Sometime in the years prior to the First World War, so the story goes, a young girl from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic community was gathering healing herbs in a forest south of Przemyśl, Southeast Poland, for her dying mother. As she searched, by the mountain of Zjavlinnia (apparition), Our Lady appeared before her, offering her a plant. She gave the plan to the girl. The girl kneeled down, and Mary disappeared, leaving her footprints on the mossy ground. The girl realised a spring had begun to flow from the footprints and brought the story of her visionary experience to the village along with this divinely proffered natural medicine. Her mother was subsequently miraculously healed, proving her story, and local clergy developed a new place of worship on the hilltop. During WWII, there were two chapels, one built over the healing well of the spring that appeared in Our Lady footprints, the other serving as a sylvan pilgrim shelter. It was unfortunately ruined in the 1950s under Polish communism.

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These days, the pilgrimage site's main message is changing, oriented to praying for peace in Ukraine and emphasizing hope as a symbol of a better and kinder future for everyone. It has become a symbolic shelter for those who seek hope in exile. The site acts as a symbolic embassy where Ukrainians are welcomed and accepted. The potential for hope, which I explore, is grounded in Thomas Aquinas's perception of hope as "a response to a sensible good", oriented toward a future good. In the woods, visitors seek a sign of the potential for outside intervention to cure the symbolic Motherland of its current travails.

Respondent: Katja Kolcio, Wesleyan University

11:45 How Nonhuman Actants have Transformed the Heritage of Soviet Repressions

Zuzanna Bogumił, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences

The Soviet repressions had far-reaching consequences for ecosystems in places where mass killings occurred, camps were located, and Soviet mega-constructions were implemented. Not all plants and species were able to adapt to such traumatized ecosystems. However, those nonhuman actants that survived began to actively transform these traumaspaces. This is a non-reflexive and often routine agency; nevertheless, it holds significant transformative power over the sites. Thus, when humans actively engage in commemorating the past, they must plan their commemorations in relation to the existing nonhuman commemorations. During my presentation, I will discuss how nonhuman actants have transformed Soviet traumaspaces and how humans react to these transformations. I will also demonstrate how humans have slowly begun to transform the traumatized spaces and how they are either using or abusing these existing nonhuman commemoration.

Respondent: Aaron Eldridge, University of Toronto

12:30 - 1:30 Lunch Break

Chair: Mark Loustau, College of the Holy Cross

1:30 From Humanitarian and to Post-Humanitarian Narrative Formation: Redefining Human and More-Than-Human Relations in the Context of Russo-Ukrainian War

Yulia Yurchuk, Södertörn University

The paper analyses the symbols and narratives in which non-human actors, mainly animals, are shaping the representations of human/more-than-human bonds in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Through these narratives we witness the extension of epistemic frames and storytelling strategies that counter imperialism and human exceptionalism. Drawing on the concept of "humanitarian narrative" as elaborated by Thomas Laqueur (1989), the paper

proposes to approach symbols and narratives of non-human animals as realization of the post-humanitarian narrative, which broadens the boundaries of the “living landscape” in which not only human life, but also non-human animals’ and even not animals’ (land- and waterscapes) existences are included. For Laqueur, the humanitarian narrative developed since the scientific revolution in the 17th century and produced a specific kind of reaction to the suffering of the others - the reactions based on compassion and sympathy. In the proposed paper, I argue that the post-humanitarian narrative extends the boundaries between human and non-human and produces not only compassion and sympathy, but also a distinct incentive for care that puts action in the continuum from past, present, into the future. Indeed, the future becomes a central driving force for the workings of this narrative. Moreover, the post-humanitarian narrative extends the understanding of whose lives are “grievable” (Butler 2009) and worth mourning/remembering/saving. The post-humanitarian narrative is a child of the twentieth and even more so of the 21st century reflecting and encompassing all kinds of “posts” – postmodernism, postsecularism, postcolonialism. It is the product of the Anthropocene that bears a critical awareness of global warming, nuclear threats, and possible catastrophic destruction of everything living.

Respondent: Yana Lyushnevskaya, Deputy Editor-in-Chief, BBC Monitoring, Kyiv Bureau and Nieman Fellow, Nieman Foundation for Journalism, Harvard University

2:15 Not Only About Humans: The Impact of Russia’s War Against Ukraine on Animals

Anna Olenenko, University of Alberta

Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine there has been a lot of media attention on the plight of animals during this war. Articles in newspapers and posts in social media covered stories about the impact of war on pets, animals in zoos, and wildlife. Cases of animals that were killed or suffered because of bombing, evacuation to other countries, flooding because of Kakhovka HPP destruction, and so on are depicted in the media in detail. Animals that served in the Ukrainian Army or survived occupation and bombing gained enormous popularity. In this way, the media constructed images of nonhuman animals in wartime and placed them alongside human animals. This paper reveals the impact of war on animals, their place in public space in Ukraine, and why animals became an important symbol of humanity, hope, and strength of the Ukrainian nation.

Respondent: Catherine Wanner, Pennsylvania State University

3:00-3:15 Coffee Break

Chair: Margarita Balmaceda, Seton Hall University

3:15 Pleistocene Park: Engineering Wilderness in a More-Than-Human World

Anya Bernstein, Harvard University

Pleistocene Park is a large-scale science experiment in Arctic Siberia in the form of a future-oriented rewilding project with the goal of mitigating climate change. The Park's creators hypothesize that introducing large herbivores into the area will slow the thawing of permafrost. Using the approach of multispecies ethnography, in attending to the nonhuman agencies at work in the project, I argue that the Park differs from other rewilding projects, which are usually ecocentric, in emerging as a survivalist project with a distinct anthropocentric bent. Even so, however, the Park's survivalist goal for humans coexists with ontologies based on collaboration and mutual aid between humans and nonhumans, and between organic and inorganic matter, with extensive agency assigned to nonhuman others. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork within the frame of the Park's various genealogies, I trace the project's underlying assumptions in equal measure to the history of Russian science and to the experience of the Park's lead scientists of sociopolitical rupture following the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a case study, Pleistocene Park is especially suited to exploring issues of time and temporality, apocalypticism and redemption, extinction, and eternity, in addition to particular visions of the natural and the human.

4:15 A Natural Laboratory? Nuclear Natures in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone

Jonathon Turnbull, University of Oxford

Ukraine has recently been described as a "laboratory" in relation to global challenges involving the environment, information, warfare, and security. Ukraine is also the site of the world's worst nuclear catastrophe of 1986: the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. The Zone straddles the border between Ukraine and Belarus and is frequently described as a natural laboratory; a place where researchers from various disciplines go to test diverse hypotheses. At the time of the catastrophe, it was predicted that Chernobyl would become a "dead zone," incapable of supporting life. In the 37 years since, however, stories of nature's resurgence in the Zone have proliferated, with images and imaginaries of both mutant life and "nature taking back control" becoming common refrains in public and scientific discourse. Indeed, Chernobyl is now an official biosphere reserve in Ukraine, yet researchers starkly contest whether nature in the Zone has recovered or not. This presentation is interested in how such diverse representations come

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to co-exist in relation to Chernobyl's "nuclear natures." It draws from fieldwork conducted in the Zone between 2019 and 2022 with researchers from the nebulous field of radioecology; a scientific community tasked with making sense of how radiation moves through and affects the natural world. It advances the notion that nuclear natures are spectacular and weird, situating itself within the emerging field of the Ukrainian environmental humanities.

5:00-5:30 - Break

5:30 - Film Screening: The Dogs That Survived // Собаки Що Вижили

Room K-354, CGIS-Knafel (North Building), 1737 Cambridge Street

Directors: Nikita Zarkh, Jonathon Turnbull, Karolina Uskakovych, and Boris Krichevsky

Cinematographer: Denys Melnyk

Producer: Eugene Rachkovsky, TABOR production

Following the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe of 26th April 1986, residents within a 30km Exclusion Zone were forced to evacuate and instructed to leave their pet animals behind. Most did so, setting out food and water, believing the authorities who said they would return within a few days. Permission to return, however, was revoked. Their cats and dogs were forced to roam the exclusion zone in search of companionship, food, and water. Later, Soviet soldiers were sent to kill the remaining animals to prevent the spread of radiation.

Today, the Zone is home to around 550 dogs, descendants of those abandoned in 1986. They live in small packs at checkpoints around the Zone where they are fed, sheltered, and cared for by workers. The Dogs that Survived tells the story of a couple, Serhii and Lena, who live in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, caring for the dogs that roam this post-nuclear wilderness.

When Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Zone was occupied for five weeks before being liberated. During the occupation, images of emaciated dogs were broadcast by workers at the power plant who were unable to feed them. Despite a lack of sustenance, however, this period also saw the birth of several new litters. Since liberation, the dogs have begun to receive care again.

The film depicts everyday life in the Zone from the perspective of dogs and their human companions. It explores the everyday human-animal relations that emerge after catastrophe, representing the endurance and resilience of human and other-than human beings in the face of disaster.

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5:00 - 6:30 GSIA Auditorium

The Soviet Everyday was Green! How Urban Farming Restored the Metabolic Rift and Fed the Soviet Union

Kate Brown, Thomas M. Siebel Distinguished Professor in the History of Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Simple kitchen gardens frame Soviet history. Gardens buoyed citizens in the founding turmoil of the Bolshevik Revolution and tolled the bell at end of the Soviet Union. In 1933, in the midst of a man-made famine that killed seven million people, Soviet citizens won the right to garden. By the fifties, more people were enrolled in garden associations than in the communist party. Brown argues that the restoration of common land and the right to self-provision was a major factor in the economic success of the USSR.

Participants:

Anya Bernstein is a Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University. Her most recent book, *The Future of Immortality: Remaking Life and Death in Contemporary Russia* (Princeton University Press, 2019), explored the interplay between ideas about immortality and life-extension industries across the Soviet Union and postsocialist Russia, drawing on archival and ethnographic methods to investigate these technoscientific and religious futurisms. The book received the 2020 William A. Douglass Prize in Europeanist Anthropology, from the Society for the Anthropology of Europe, American Anthropological Association. Her first book, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), was the winner of the Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion, from the American Academy of Religion, and an Honorable Mention for the Davis Center Book Prize in Political and Social Studies, from the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (2014). Her current book project, titled *Pleistocene Park: Extinction and Eternity in the Russian Arctic* (under contract with Princeton University Press), extends her previous work on technoscience and future scenarios in Russia to issues of climate change through chronicling the efforts of a transnational team of scientists to “resurrect” an extinct ecosystem in Arctic Siberia. As a visual anthropologist Bernstein has directed, filmed, and produced several award-winning documentary films on Buryat Buddhism and shamanism, including *Join Me in Shambhala* (2002) and *In Pursuit of the Siberian Shaman* (2006).

Zuzanna Bogumił, works at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her published works include: *More than Alive: The Dead, Orthodoxy and Remembrance in Post-Soviet Russia* (with T. Voronina, Peter Lang, 2023), *Gulag Memories: The Rediscovery and Commemoration of Russia’s Repressive Past* (Berghahn Books, 2018); *Milieux de mémoire in Late Modernity: Local Communities, Religion and Historical Politics* (with M. Głowacka-Grajper, Peter Lang, 2019), and the co-edited volume *Memory and Religion from a Postsecular Perspective* (Routledge 2022).

Kate Brown is the author of several prize-winning histories, including *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford 2013). Her latest book, *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future* (Norton 2019), translated into six languages, won the Marshall Shulman and Reginald Zelnik Prizes for the best book in East European History, plus the Silver Medal for Laura Shannon Book Prize. *Manual for Survival* was also a finalist for the 2020 National Book Critics Circle Award, the Pushkin House Award and the Ryszard Kapuściński Award for Literary Reportage.

Julia Buyskykh is a historian (BA) and anthropologist (MA), co-founder of an NGO the Centre for Applied Anthropology in Kyiv, Ukraine. She received her Ph.D. in History and Ethnology (candidate of science) from Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, had a post-doc at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw (2015 – 2016), and several research stays in Polish academic institutions (2014-2015, 2022). In 2017 she was a research fellow in the frames of “Prisma-Ukraine – Research Network Eastern Europe” scheme,

at the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin, Germany. She spent the academic year of 2019-2020 at Pennsylvania State University as a Fulbright visiting scholar. She was a Sanctuary Fellow at the University College Cork, Ireland (September 2022 – February 2023). Her research interests include lived religion (Christianity) in Ukraine and Poland, inter-confessional relationships and ecumenical practices, pilgrimages, memory and borderlands studies, Polish-Ukrainian history, ethics and empathy in qualitative research.

Emily Channell-Justice is the Director of the Temerty Contemporary Ukraine Program at the Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University. A sociocultural anthropologist, she first started learning the Ukrainian language and carrying out research in Ukraine in 2012. She pursued research on political activism and social movements among students and feminists during the 2013-2014 Euromaidan mobilizations. She is the author of an ethnography, *Without the State: Self-Organization and Political Activism in Ukraine* (University of Toronto; 2022), and an edited volume, *Decolonizing Queer Experience: LGBT+ Narratives from Eastern Europe and Eurasia* (Lexington Books; 2020). She has published academic articles in several journals, including *History and Anthropology*, *Revolutionary Russia*, and *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. She received her PhD from The Graduate Center, City University of New York, in September 2016, and she was a Havighurst Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor of International Studies at Miami University, Ohio from 2016-2019.

Aaron Eldridge is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto. His research studies the tensions of contemporary revolutionary and religious practices in the Middle East with interests in critical theory, psychoanalysis, materialism, and analytic philosophy. His book manuscript, *A Desert Place: Arab Orthodox Monasticism in Postwar Lebanon*, coordinates the flourishing of monasticism with dispossession in contemporary Lebanon. His new research project studies Muslim and Eastern Christian land endowments and their entanglement with ecologies and theologies of the unseen. He is also a translator, and is currently completing an annotated translation of *Confession and Psychoanalysis* by Aspiro Jabbur, a text that draws out resonances between Eastern Christian monasticism, psychoanalysis, and Islamic Sufism.

Katja Kolcio is Chair of the Dance Department and Associate Professor of Dance, Environmental Studies; Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies; and Education Studies at Wesleyan University, CT, specializing in somatics and movement research. Kolcio studies the role of the body in social change, resilience, and psycho-social wellness, with a regional focus on Ukraine. Her current research Vitality Project Donbas is a collaboration with the Ukrainian NGO Development Foundation/Community Self-Help to develop and assess the impact of somatic methods of movement awareness for generating resilience and agency during the current Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since 2015 Kolcio has led workshops in somatic resilience for war relief workers in Ukraine, working with activists, volunteers, the National Guard, Ukrainian Armed Forces, and veterans. This program has been developed into a field manual and book,

The Force of Breath: Skills for Psychological Recovery, co-authored with Marta Kovalova, Lyudmila Magdasiuk, Antonij Melnik, and Marta Pyvovarenko, and published in Ukrainian (Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, 2022). An English language edition is under contract.

Yana Lyushnevskaya is a senior journalist and deputy editor-in-chief in the Kyiv bureau of BBC Monitoring. She covers media, political and security developments in Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, her coverage has focused on exploring Ukrainian media's response to the war. She has covered other major stories, including the annexation of Crimea, her home region, and the war in eastern Ukraine. Lyushnevskaya is studying how media in conflict-torn countries can transition from war to peace and contribute to creating a post-war media environment that is free, diverse, and pluralistic as a 2023-24 Nieman Fellow at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University.

Anna Olenenko is currently is a PhD student in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta and a member of the European Society for Environmental History. She graduated from Zaporizhia National University in 2007 and earned a Candidate of Sciences in History degree from the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2013. Anna's research interests are related to the environmental history of Ukraine, especially the Steppe region, and animal studies. Her latest publications include a chapter (co-authored with Stefan Dorondel) "In Quest of Development: Territorialization and the Transformation of the Southern Ukrainian Wetlands, 1880–1960" in *A New Ecological Order. Development and the Transformation of Nature in Eastern Europe*. (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022) and a chapter "Camels in European Russia: Exotic Farm Animals and Agricultural Knowledge" in *Thinking Russia's History Environmentally*. Berghahn, 2023, pp. 151–173.

Daria Storoshchuk is the Jaroslaw and Nadia Mihaychuk Postdoctoral Fellow at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. She recently completed her Ph.D. at Stanford University. Her dissertation, titled "The Image Between Appearance and Being: Iconic Vision in Ukrainian and Russian Worlds", examines how icon theory and theology is taken up across different media and genres—principally the graphic arts, literature, and film. During her fellowship year at Harvard, Daria is revising her dissertation into a book manuscript and working on two articles, which address pokrova imagery in the ongoing war in Ukraine, and Aleksei Shchusev's dual legacy as a pre-revolutionary church architect and the designer of the Lenin Mausoleum, respectively. Her research interests include the visual arts, Ukrainian formalism, decolonial studies, and Orthodox theology.

Jonathon Turnbull is a cultural, environmental, and urban geographer from Newcastle upon Tyne. His research examines how understandings of nature are produced and contested across geographical contexts and why this matters for more-than-human social, political, and economic life. Jonny's ESRC-funded PhD research took place in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine where he conducted long-term ethnographic research examining contrasting and spectacular narratives concerning nature's recovery in the Zone. His current postdoctoral research investigates urban rewilding initiatives, from top-down governance schemes to local

community-based practices and raptor recovery in the British Isles at the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford, funded by the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery.

Catherine Wann is a Professor of Anthropology, History and Religious Studies at The Pennsylvania State University. She earned a doctorate in Cultural Anthropology from Columbia University. Using ethnographic and archival methods, her research centers on the politics of religion and increasingly on conflict mediation, animal rights, and trauma healing. In 2020 she was awarded the Distinguished Scholar Prize from the Association for the Study of Eastern Christianity. She is the convenor of the Working Group on Lived Religion in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Her most recent monograph, *Everyday Religiosity and the Politics of Belonging in Ukraine* (Cornell, 2022) won the Omeljan Pritsak Best Book Prize and received an Honorable Mention for the Heldt Prize. She is the editor of the forthcoming *Dispossession: Anthropological Perspectives on Russia's War Against Ukraine* (Routledge, 2023). Her current book project is entitled, *Animals and War: Empathy and Healing during the Russo-Ukrainian War*.

Yuliya Yurchuk (PhD, Senior Lecturer, Department of History of Ideas, Södertörn University) is a historian writing about Ukraine and Eastern Europe. She received her PhD in history from Stockholm University. She is the author of the book *Reordering of Meaningful Worlds: Memory of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in Post-Soviet Ukraine* and co-editor of the volume *Memory and Religion from a Postsecular Perspective* (Routledge, 2022). Her articles have appeared in *Memory Studies*, *Nationalities Papers*, *Baltic Worlds*, and *Ukraina Moderna*. Currently she is working on the project in the field of transnational intellectual history titled "From Sweden with Love: Circulation and interpretation of Ellen Key's ideas about love, motherhood, and upbringing in the late Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union (1890-1930s)" funded by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies.

This workshop is sponsored by the Working Group on Lived Religion in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, the Center for Governance and Culture in Europe at the University of St. Gallen (GCE – HSG), and the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute



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