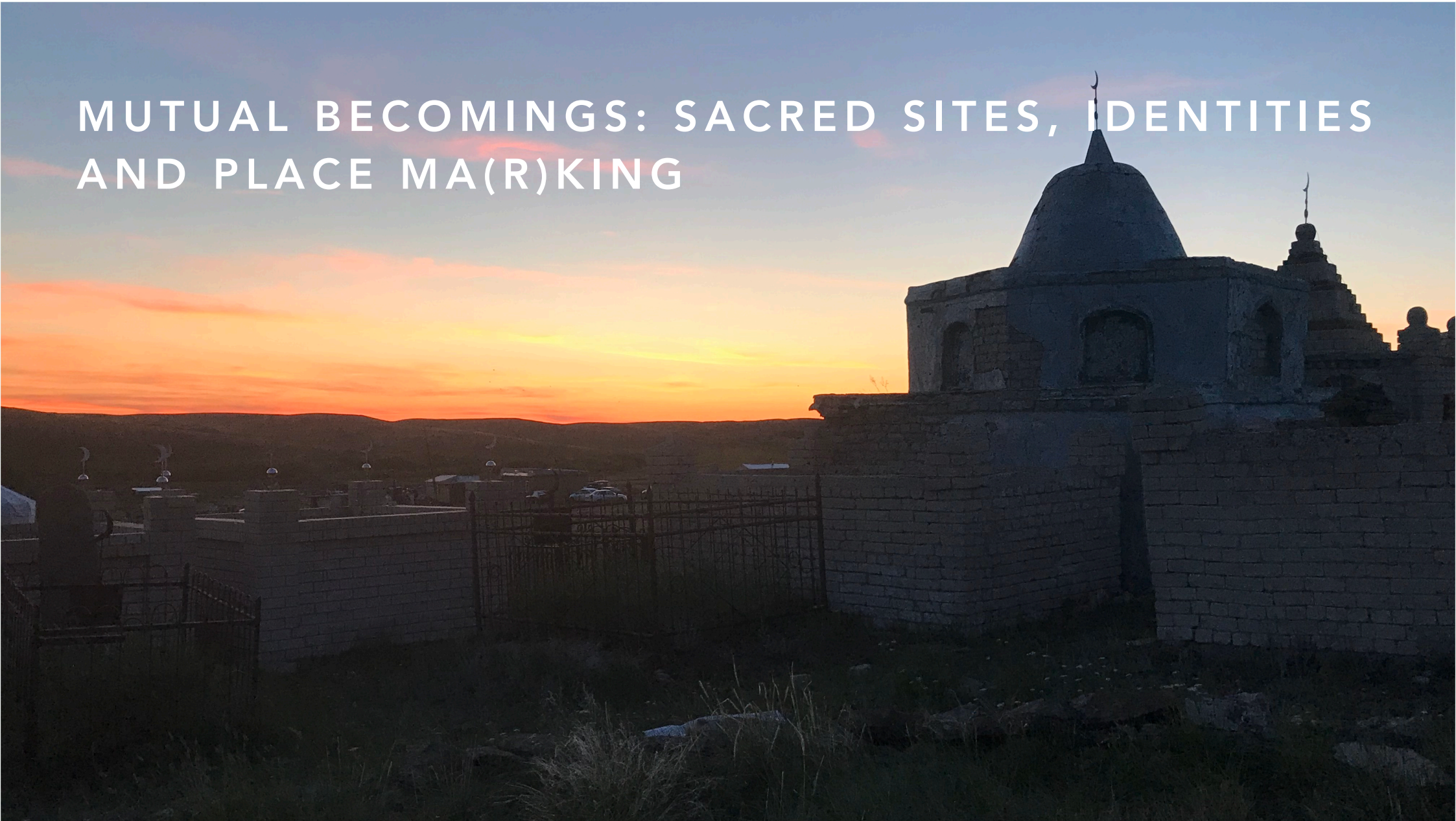


# MUTUAL BECOMINGS: SACRED SITES, IDENTITIES AND PLACE MA(R)KING



21/22 SEPTEMBER  
UNIVERSITY OF COLOGNE  
ONLINE WORKSHOP

TUESDAY, 21  
SEPTEMBER

13:00–13:30 CET:

Welcome and Introduction

13:30–14:15 CET:

Iwona Kaliszewska

*Halal Landscapes during the Covid-19  
Pandemic in Dagestan, North Caucasus*



# TUESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER

14:15–15:00 CET:

Florian Mühlfried

*Capitalist Syncretism: Financial Sovereignty and the Appropriation of Sacred Sites in Highland Georgia*

15:00–15:45 CET:

Lili Di Puppò

*Remembering Eternity: Re-awakening the Muslim Self and the Sacred Land in Russia's Urals*

15:45–16:30 CET:

Jesko Schmoller

*People of the Mountain: Interactions between Humans and the Landscape in 21st-century Bashkiria*

# WEDNESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER

13:00–13:45 CET:

Hannah Theaker

*Standing Higher than the City Walls: Xining  
Dongguan Great Mosque and Making  
Muslim Public Space in China*

13:45–14:30 CET:

Mustafa Şen

*The Diyanet's Mosques as a Marker of  
Turkish Islamism in Contemporary Central  
Asia*



# WEDNESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER

14:30–15:15 CET:

Anna Sehnalova

*Tibetan Sacred Sites in the 21st Century: Ritual Practice, Contested Place-Making, Identity, and Materiality in Mutual Becomings*

15:15–16:00 CET:

Rabia Harmanşah

*Conflict, Belonging and Religious Heritage in the post-1974 Period in Cyprus*

16:00–17:00 CET:

Discussion of Publication Project

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### **Remembering Eternity: Re-awakening the Muslim Self and the Sacred Land in Russia's Urals**

This paper explores the "reawakening" of a Muslim self and of the sacred land among Sufi *murids* in Russia's Urals through the prism of the notion of *remembering*. Several holy figures emerged during my fieldwork at pilgrimage sites in this region: *awliya*, *sahaba* and *shuhuda* but also mythical figures such as the Bashkir hero Ural Batyr and Khidr, the hidden servant of God. A thread uniting these figures is their role in (re-)awakening the souls of the inhabitants of the Bashkir land to the remembrance of God, at different historical times but also beyond time. I argue that the process of remembering these saintly figures happens not simply *horizontally* (in the sense of the linear view of history), but most importantly, *vertically* (in the sense of a spiritual connection). I connect my analysis of *remembering* as a spiritual practice to recent debates about the Muslim self and Muslim "belief" in the anthropology and sociology of Islam, highlighting the neglected aspect of the *fitra* (El-Yousfi 2020). In particular, I want to explore the difficulties of studying transcendence from the perspective of an anthropological tradition, in which the "real" and the "imaginary" are associated respectively with the "empirical" physical world and with an "invisible" realm, inaccessible to a conventional scientific approach. This perspective is actually reversed in Sufi metaphysics and in the practice of *remembering the divine*. Another aspect of transcendence that I want to consider is how experiences of an "otherworldly" realm are actually connected with worldly affairs, in particular identity issues, in Sufi circles in the Urals.

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### **Conflict, Belonging and Religious Heritage in the post-1974 Period in Northern Cyprus**

In many historical and geographical contexts, one of the expected consequences of the ethnic and religious conflicts is the destruction and appropriation of material culture. Tangible cultural remains are valued as traces of history and symbols of culture; therefore, they have the potential to serve as flashpoints of conflict and/or as places in which religious tolerance is exhibited. Destroying heritage renders a narrative of an intermingled and heterogeneous life with the Other unfeasible and unimaginable. In Cyprus, during the 1950s and 1960s and after the division of the island, Greek and Turkish Cypriots destroyed each other's churches, mosques, and cemeteries as physical remnants of an unwanted past. While the religious heritage was transformed and reimagined by the states to create new symbolic geographies and to legitimize state policies, the sacred sites continued to play a significant role in maintaining connections with the past and the lost land for Cypriots in the post-conflict landscape. This paper focuses on the politics of memory and religious heritage in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus through the examination of two case studies. The paper depends on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Cyprus for two years.



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### **Halal Landscapes during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Dagestan, North Caucasus**

'Halal landscapes' emerge through the gradual infusion of Islam into the sphere of everyday activities, where they form 'Islam-inspired' social spaces, where religious conduct is facilitated and social life – the area of interaction between human and non-human actors – has its unique materiality and temporality. In this paper, I look into halal landscapes of my Dagestani interlocutors during the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in June 2021. During that time, mosques were officially closed and bigger gatherings prohibited, people, however, wavered within their halal landscapes joining *mavlids* or collective prayers at shrines that gathered hundreds of people.

The daily undertakings of Dagestanis during pandemics (and beyond) can be well described by visualizing their movement within a landscape, which is both processual and hierarchical. In a way, thus, each individual has a halal landscape of his/her own. Individual people move differently along their landscapes, depending on their networks, experiences and individual preferences. However, as individuals waver and move within a landscape, some features of their landscapes become shared, thus forming a larger, common landscape. How is this landscape modified by such a powerful non-human actor as the virus Sars-Cov-2? How does the virus influence people's movement within halal landscapes, including their interaction with material reality of shrines or mosques? And finally, how/if material objects such as face masks and other PPE shape religious practices and experiences? My (work-in-progress) paper is based on the results of 3 weeks of research in June 2021 as well as earlier field observations gathered during regular fieldwork in the republic between 2015 and 2019.

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### **Capitalist Syncretism: Financial Sovereignty and the Appropriation of Sacred Sites in Highland Georgia**

As the neighbouring regions Pshavi and Khevsureti, the Georgian highland province Tusheti is dotted with sacred sites indistinctly referred to as pagan, animist or syncretistic by most specialists. All of these places provide restricted access and are taboo to women. This is why, according to a popular narrative in Tusheti's regional capital Omalo, a dormitory meant to be built by the Soviet authorities in the 1980s was never finished – it was perceived as too close to the local sacred site. Later on, according to the same narrative, the building was used by the military that left, however, after some uncanny experiences attributed to emanations of the sacred site. Afterwards, it remained a ruin until in 2019, the businessmen Giorgi Papiashvili invested a large sum to turn the building into a luxury hotel. Concomitantly, he financed a roof of the sacred site, ornamented with Georgian saints and thus framing the site as Christian Orthodox. At the same time, the roof also expresses the material investment into the hotel and thus financial sovereignty over (sacred) space. The sacred site became a hybrid not only of “paganism” and Christian Orthodoxy, but also of „paganism and capitalism” – with the latter dominating the former. In this context, capitalism proves to be more totalitarian than Soviet socialism, as it radically eradicates spatial alternatives and local “reserves” of sovereignty.

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### **People of the Mountain: Interactions between Humans and the Landscape in 21st-century Bashkiria**

My paper considers the struggle over the Shihan hills, located close to the city of Sterlitamak in the Southern Urals or, more precisely, in the Republic of Bashkortostan. Historically, the territory belonged to the Bashkir Yurmat tribe. The Bashkir people are traditionally closely connected to the land they inhabit, wherefore space, history and identity are interwoven for them. According to one legend, the mother of Dobun-Mergen, an ancestor of Genghis Khan, was from this area. Since Toratau, one of the Shihan hills, came to be recognised as a sacred site, it was here that Bashkir khans were appointed during the uprisings of the 17th and early 18th centuries. The interaction of people and landscape also turns up in the narrative of a Bashkir activist from Ufa, who is convinced that shamans used to charge the hills with energy.

Nowadays, the Shihan hills are threatened in their existence by the Bashkir Soda Company, which has already demolished one of them to process the soda for human consumption. While guardians of nature and indigenous culture first congregated at Toratau, protests erupted in August 2020 at Kushtau. In a rare scenario, the protesters were able to push back both police and thugs hired by the Bashkir Soda Company. Another strategic move to preserve the Shihan hills was the recent creation of the project "Geopark Toratau". Over the last two years, an infrastructure has emerged at Toratau, allowing visitors to enjoy the place as a touristic site. But visitors are just as much involved in processes of place-making, commemoration and commodification, when, for instance, people bring home souvenirs that indicate the natural environment or Bashkir tradition.

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**Tibetan Sacred Sites in the 21st Century: Ritual Practice, Contested Place-Making, Identity, and Materiality in Mutual Becomings**

As a contribution to the 'Mutual Becomings: Sacred Sites, Identities and Place Ma(r)king' workshop, this paper explores these processes in contemporary Tibet through studying the practice of pilgrimage to one of the iconic mountains of Tibet and also one of the most venerated as the seat of a powerful deity and a sacred site, Anyé Machen in East Tibet (contemporary Golok Prefecture, Qinghai Province, PRC).

Tibet and the Himalayas are currently experiencing rapid changes: ecological, economic, political, cultural, ethnic. In Tibet within the PRC, many of these trends go hand in hand with modernisation and globalisation as accelerated by the state, along with its own policies. Further, religious practice and institutions have been changing and developing vividly in the context of their revitalisation after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the subsequently initiated economic reforms (in 1978), and the 'Great Development of the West' strategy in the 21st century. How do these happenings inform Tibetan religious practice and notions related to sacred mountains and pilgrimage to them? What stands behind the recent boom in pilgrimage, and how do pilgrims interpret and adjust their behaviour following the fast changes they experience even in between the most significant pilgrimage years which occur every twelve years?

The presentation tackles these questions to show how historical interpretations of pilgrimage are challenged and accustomed, which impacts can market and growth of the standard of living and economic potential, commercialisation, secularisation, and touristification have on religious practice, and how do pilgrims use this situation to their own benefit. This includes spiritual enhancement sought through the pilgrimage practice but also expressions of ethnic and national identity as a (re)production of the generalised 'Tibetan' identity and community. The work shows the present contestations of this significant sacred site by these different forces and their making, as well as physical and material marking, of the place. It reveals how such an interaction produces 'mutual becomings' in which one side would not exist without the other.

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### **The Diyanet's Mosques as a Marker of Turkish Islamism in Contemporary Central Asia**

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey has become one of the most active countries in the newly emerging Central Asian states. Turkish authorities, right-wing and Islamist circles have defined Central Asia as a cradle of Turkish Islam, and they emphasized the ethnic, linguistic and religious ties with the region. For the majority of Turkish people, Central Asian peoples are their brethren separated by the Bolsheviks. Now, it is time to re-erect the ties with the region and brethren on a new basis. In this endeavour, religion has become an essential component in creating a new geography that can support the idea of Great Turkey, promoted by the right-wing political currents since the 1950s. Among other official institutions and unofficial groups, from the outset, the official Turkish religious institution called Diyanet, has been very active in the region. After presenting the profile of the Diyanet's activities in the region, this paper will try to show how the Diyanet defines and presents the region based on Islamic ideas. In this context, it will examine the Diyanet's policy of building mosques in the region as a marker of Turkish Islamism. The paper will specifically focus on Hoca Ahmet Yasawi as the patron-saint of Turkic peoples and the site of Hoca Ahmet Yasawi as a sacred place venerated by the peoples of the region.

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**Standing Higher than the City Walls: Xining Dongguan Great Mosque and Making Muslim Public Space in China**

Taking a long durée perspective, this paper seeks to explore the contested materiality and identities centred on the Xining Dongguan Great Mosque, one of the most important mosques in the China's northwest and a centre for the Ikhwan, a reformist Islamic teaching. The mosque is known today for the mass performance of the jumu'ah prayers by the Ikhwan faithful. The roads around the mosque close each Friday as tens of thousands of Muslims pray in the streets, their performance often watched by crowds of tourists: a public space for Islam, where the sacred space of the mosque extends into the secular streets, set in a non-Muslim and often profoundly Islamophobic society, where the watchers seen the weekly prayer performance as representative of a Hui identity.

But the Dongguan mosque defies easy categorisation. Although the mosque claims a history of almost 1000 years, in the late 19th century it was briefly expropriated from the Muslim community in the wake of a destructive rebellion on the grounds that its minaret exceeded the height of the city walls, a symbolic challenge to the authority of the Qing state. Repossessed and rebuilt by the Muslim community, the mosque became a site of their revival and the centre for the reformist Ikhwan movement. The Ikhwan are known for both their tight centralisation of religious authority, opposition to Sufi sects and their close relationship with Muslim powerholders, making the mosque both a sign of unity and of division. Made and remade across the last century, Xining Dongguan Mosque continues to both shape and be shaped by state and observers, Ikhwan and Sufi, and the ideas of community and modernity produced at the intersection of these four.