



A CRISIS OF MORAL ECOLOGY: MAGAR AGRO-PASTORALISM IN DHORPATAN HUNTING RESERVE, NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

Prior political ecology studies have explored the vulnerability of pastoralism and conflicts between protected areas and pastoralist livelihoods. Some conservation regimes regard Indigenous pastoralists' institutions, knowledge, self-governance and self-determination as incompatible with contemporary conservation on the grounds that the associated practices are unsustainable. Based on critical ethnography, this paper examines the moral ecology of Indigenous Magar agro-pastoralism in the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve of mid-western Nepal. Traditional Magar management is in crisis due to reserve policies and practices. From a political ecology perspective, I show that the traditional moral ecology of agro-pastoralism sustains complex relationships with the rangelands. Traditional institutions uphold a moral ecology that is deeply rooted in spiritual practices and fosters a sense of responsibility for the preservation of biodiversity and nature. Current conservation policies inadequately recognise these Indigenous moral principles and weaken harmonious socio-ecological relations. In order to manage protected areas sustainably in high-altitude regions, it is crucial to manage agro-pastoralism within the framework of traditional moral ecology through Indigenous peoples' self-governance and self-determination.

Key words: Self-determination, traditional institutions, pastoralism, livelihoods, spirituality

INTRODUCTION

Globally, transhumance pastoralism in agro-pastoral zones in high altitude lands has become vulnerable due to the pressure of climate change and the growth of protected areas (PAs) (Yilmaz et al., 2019). Conflicts between pastoralists and PA authorities in relation to lands and resources are widespread (Toutain et al., 2004). In part as a response to social justice and human rights concerns, policies and practices have shifted from a protectionist model of conservation (1950–1980) to a participatory approach (1980–2000), with the institution of multipurpose buffer zones and a wider landscape approach (in the 2000s), improving recognition of the socio-economic needs of Indigenous peoples and local communities (Aryal et al., 2020). However, the shift from area-oriented PA conservation to community-based conservation for the purpose of reducing conflict and community development has not always been successfully implemented (Du et al., 2015). In some

regions, community-based approaches have actually reinforced 'fortress' conservation, thereby weakening the link between conservation and Indigenous peoples' (IPs) traditional practices (Haller & Galvin, 2011). The IUCN and the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have long been advocating for Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) for the global conservation of biodiversity, thereby recognising pre-existing Indigenous knowledge, self-governance, institutions and self-determination (Dudley, 2008). Despite such efforts, in some regions PA policies and practices continue to threaten customary livelihoods of IPs and their cosmovision, knowledge and resource management practices (Domínguez & Luoma, 2020; Toledo, 2013). Further research is needed to better understand conflicts between customary livelihoods and PA policies, with a key issue being a disjunction between traditional moral ecologies of human–nature

relationships and contemporary conservation (Griffin et al., 2019; Jacoby, 2001; Norget, 2012).

Thompson's (1971) moral economy, which holds that social and moral values are deeply ingrained in communal economic relations, is the foundation of the moral ecology concept. First introduced by Jacoby (2001), moral ecology studies seek nuanced understandings of local communities' relationships with ecosystems, which are typically founded on a homegrown environmental ethic. Moral ecology, as defined by Martínez-Reyes (2021), concerns the moral rules that result from the profound, historical and spiritual relationships between humans and non-human nature. These ethically-based rules direct and shape the behaviours of community members in their interactions with their surroundings, so fostering connection and mutual sustainability (Martínez-Reyes, 2021). Such ethics ingrained in long-standing practices of creating intricate interactions with biodiversity and ecosystems have been disregarded or criminalised by some conservation regimes (Jacoby, 2001). According to Griffin et al. (2019), the idea of moral ecology refers to a vernacular, informal and unwritten way of managing 'the commons' as a space sustainably maintained by 'the commoners' for generations. Norget (2012) regards Indigenous peoples' ethics and sacred practices as embodied moral ecologies that are deeply connected to nature, and showed how such regimes may conflict with contemporary conservation policies. In Nepal, Thing (2019) analysed how the moral ecology of the Sonaha Indigenous minority, which encompasses complex meanings and fosters the subsistence use of riverine resources, has been marginalised by conservation discourses. Such studies show that conservation policies and practices have challenged the customary moral ecologies that include Indigenous norms, values, beliefs and ethical relationships with nature.

Twenty PAs cover almost one-quarter (23.39 per cent or 34,419.75 km²) of Nepal, encompassing ancestral lands of diverse IPs from lowland Terai to high Himalayan regions (Stevens, 2013). In 1992, the fourth amendment of Nepal's *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973* instituted 13 buffer zones, allowing livelihood activities of IPs and local communities in proximity to relevant PAs (Bhattarai et al., 2017). Buffer zones have brought significant changes in conservation and livelihoods of local people, albeit not always with positive outcomes (Bhusal, 2014). Although participatory modalities have made many promises, in some jurisdictions legal and institutional spaces are too limited to allow IPs and local people to have meaningful

opportunities to influence plans and programmes (Poudel et al., 2010).

Studies of PAs and agro-pastoralism in Himalayan Nepal reveal mixed results. State-led conservation has increased the vulnerability of pastoralism, a mainstay of Indigenous peoples' livelihoods, and contributed to a decline of customary laws and practices, communal ownership, Indigenous knowledge, and institutions governing subsistence pastoral systems (Gentle & Thwaites, 2016; Tiwari et al., 2020). State policies do not adequately recognise and respect the ICCAs integral to rights-based conservation and the operationalisation of international standards such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the International Labour Organization's *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention*. High Himalayan protected areas marginalise Indigenous practices, despite biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management by IPs who continue to maintain their customary ICCAs (Stevens, 2013). State legislation for the management of forests and rangelands also marginalises IPs' economic, socio-cultural and ecological practices (Gentle & Thwaites, 2016).

This paper examines a crisis for the moral ecology of agro-pastoralism among the Magar Indigenous group in Nepal residing in villages adjoining the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, a high mountain protected area in East Rukum. I argue that current conservation policies and practices fail to recognise and respect the long-standing Magar moral ecology for managing rangelands through agro-pastoralism, thereby compromising ethical socio-ecological relations. I analyse this issue from the perspective of political ecology, which has not been previously applied to this context. Political ecology is an appropriate frame to analyse the dynamics of power in livelihood conflicts (Adams, 2015). Among the five dominant narratives of political ecology as outlined by Robbins (2012), I particularly use 'conservation and control' as a key analytic tool to explain how the conservation regime controls resources and adversely affects local livelihoods and socio-political systems of managing resources. I analyse how current conservation plans and practices have displaced competing local discourses of resource management.

STUDY AREA

The Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve (DHR), which was established in 1983 and gazetted in 1987, is the only hunting reserve in Nepal. The goal was to encourage tourism, protect endangered wildlife and sub-alpine and high temperate vegetation, and manage Nepali and foreign sport hunting of Blue Sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*)

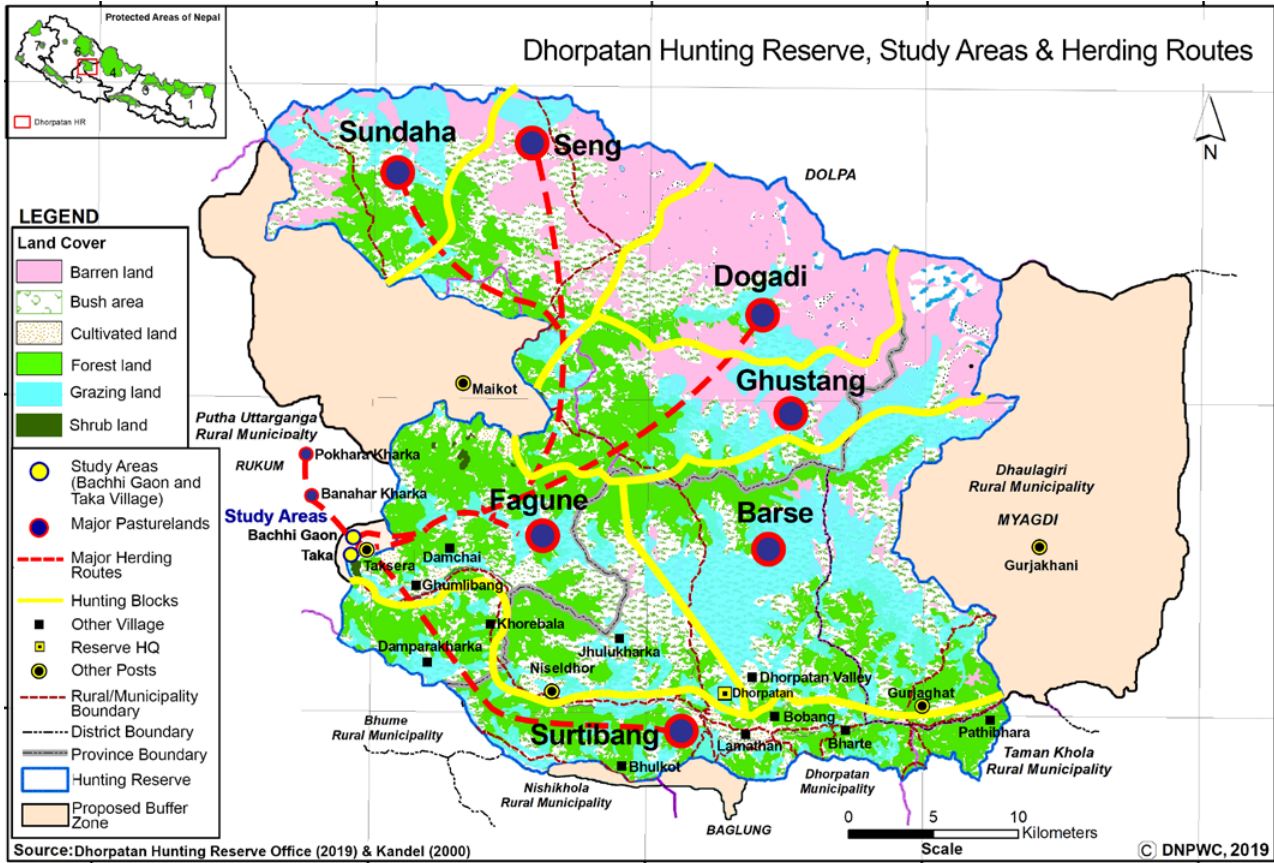


Figure 1. Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, study areas and herding routes.



Animals grazing in the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve highlands © Indra Mani Rai



Herds of animals in a low valley of the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve © Indra Mani Rai



Pasturelands within Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve © Indra Mani Rai

and Himalayan Tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*). The DHR covers an area of 1,325 km², occupying 60 per cent of Rukum, 26 per cent of Baglung and 14 per cent of Myagdi district in the Dhaulagiri mountain range of mid-western Nepal, with altitudes varying from 3,000 m to 7,000 m above sea level (DHRO, 2019). The core area of the reserve covers parts of Dhaulagiri Rural Municipality of Myagdi, Dhorpatan Municipality and Taman Khola and Nishikhola Rural Municipality of Baglung, and Bhume and Putha Uttarganga Rural Municipality of East Rukum districts (Figure 1). It lies in the ancestral lands of the Magar, the third largest among Nepal's 142 castes and Indigenous groups whose population of 2,013,498 comprises 6.9 per cent of the country's total (NSO, 2021).

The *Pasture Land Nationalization Act 1974* vests ownership of pasturelands with the Government of Nepal. This Act permits animal grazing subject to the annual payment of a maximum of three rupees for each large animal (yak, cow, buffalo, horse, mule), and one rupee for each small animal (sheep, goat). Under the *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973* and the *Wildlife Reserve Rules 1977*, local people seeking to graze their animals inside the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve require written consent from the reserve warden. The *Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve Management Plan 2019* prohibits Magar from hunting, collecting herbal plants, extracting timber for making houses and livestock sheds, and using fire to promote the establishment of alpine pasture for livestock (DHRO, 2019). And while the plan makes some allowance for customary grazing practices, the regulatory regime curtails the autonomy and self-determination of traditional Magar management. The plan also proposes a buffer zone (Figure 1), yet to be implemented, that would regulate activities in villages adjoining the reserve.

The Bachhi Gaon and Taka villages study sites (with an area of 75 km², 400 households and a population of 2,143) are located within Ward 10 of Putha Uttarganga Rural Municipality (with an area of 560 km² and a population of 18,954 in 14 wards). The villages closely adjoin the DHR. The villages are located in East Rukum, which covers 60 per cent of the reserve and includes four of the reserve's seven hunting blocks. The settlements are believed to be the Magars' oldest, having been homelands for many generations in which their long-standing agro-pastoralism, cultural and religious practices are maintained.

For over a decade, Magars have been speaking out against Indigenous human rights violations. In 2012, Magar activists created the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve Affected Peoples' Struggle Committee (DHRAPSC).

DHRAPSC has actively participated in protests, strikes, petitions, public education, and lobbying of relevant authorities. International human rights standards, in particular the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the International Labour Organization *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention*, to which the Government of Nepal is a party, have served as guidance for the concerns they raise. The UN human rights discourse has shaped Magar strategies, advocacy activities and conduct. The proposed buffer zone, which is home to over 24,000 people, has been the focus of their most recent activities. The Magar community were not consulted about the proposal, nor included in any of the processes involved in formulating reserve plans, policies and programmes. The DHRAPSC chairperson has pointed out that only a small number of local elites, political operatives and government representatives at the local level were aware of and took part in such processes. For this reason, Magar activists have been speaking out against the declaration of a buffer zone, but to date this has had little apparent influence on government agencies.

METHODS

Critical ethnography

This paper is based on data compiled for a larger critical ethnographic research project I conducted from mid-2021 to mid-2022. The aim of the project was to document and understand injustices (Madison, 2020) suffered by Magar agro-pastoralists in Bachhi Gaon and Taka villages. I purposively selected village members and conducted a series of open interviews with them (Cohen et al., 2018). Respondents included a community elder or shaman (male), four youths including two women, and two Magar activists (males) from each village. I also conducted focus group discussions with six male herders from each village. Men were my preferred dominant participants because they had more herding experience than women, who primarily engage with household chores and small-scale farming in the pasturelands. The interviews and focus groups enabled me to understand the deep-rooted moral ecology of agro-pastoralism, and their experiences of the interface with DHR. In addition, I conducted interviews with two reserve managers to understand their perspectives. All conversations took place in the Nepali language. After transcribing the data from Nepali into English, I cross-checked translations to ensure that the meanings of the original texts were preserved.

To further explore the moral ecology of the Magar, I engaged in informal observation (Cohen et al., 2018) of pasturelands, herding practices and cultural practices

associated with Magar sacred sites and plant species of spiritual significance. During the research process, I paid particular attention to obtaining participants' free, prior and informed consent; protecting their privacy and confidentiality; and respecting their right of self-determination. I used recordings, field notes, digital photos and reflective journals to record data from interviews and observation. Other information sources included documents held in the DHR office and advocacy documents collected by Magar activists.

In order to understand the crisis of the moral ecology of the Magar people, I described and analysed these data from the perspective of political ecology. The analysis comprised a qualitative classification of the transcribed data into key themes (Cohen et al., 2018), which served as a means to identify and structure the key findings reported in the next section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Magar spirituality and moral ecology

Magars' worship of rangelands is termed *Bal Puja* or *Bhumya Puja*. A key event is a traditional village assembly, *Kachahari*, which is held annually on 15 June. Their worship includes the construction of a shrine out of a flat stone upon which is placed wheat-flour bread inscribed with markings depicting local plants and animals. They also sacrifice a *Bal*, a sheep that has been separated from a flock. The Magar revere the rangelands in order to receive blessings from their departed ancestors. Their worship also seeks improved livestock and crop yields, protection of crops and cattle from wild animals, avoidance of floods and landslides, peace and harmony within the community and the prosperity of kin. A shaman offers *Nakai*, placing a tiny portion of fermented millet on a small flat stone in remembrance of the spirits of deceased community members. East Himalayan Fir (*Abies spectabilis*) are also planted for this purpose, as they believe deceased community members' spirits are eternally housed in such trees.

The *Bhumya Puja* also promotes sacred values of the lands and natural resources. In an interview, a shaman in Taka village indicated that such worship focuses on the lands and spirits (*gel*) of ancestors as well as the spirits of animals (wild boar, leopard, bear, monkey and snake) and plants such as East Himalayan Fir, Katus (*Castanopsis indica*), Bhorlo (*Bauhinia vahlii*) and Titepati (*Artemisia vulgaris*). Ritual worship of these plants is considered necessary to appease ancestral spirits. Rituals and shrines devoted to sacred beings demonstrate the reverence Magar have for the spirits of human and non-human beings. Spiritual ties with

plant and animal species constitute a moral ecology through which community members are taught to coexist peacefully with flora and fauna. This moral ecology is deeply connected with sacred lands, animals, birds and plants of the alpine region. Magar sacred beliefs and worldview express a fundamental ethical interpretation of the environment in which they live (Norget, 2012). Spiritual practices and rituals are undertaken to reciprocate and maintain balance among humans, spirits of ancestors, flora and fauna, lands, and the environment as a whole.

The moral ecology of the Magar is closely linked to their spiritual practices, which are crucial to the preservation of nature and biodiversity. Offerings, prayers and acts of reverence for nature are all part of the ritual of *Bhumya Puja*. They have a profound respect, a deep regard and veneration for all living and non-living beings in the rangelands. This spiritual connection to nature fosters a strong sense of responsibility to safeguard and conserve biodiversity. For example, I observed that the *Sabapo*, a Magar sacred site inside the DHR, had been fenced by a stone wall to prevent animals from grazing significant plant species. Rather than degrading resources, they promote the regrowth of the flora and wildlife to meet future material and spiritual needs. Magar have a deep sense of accountability for the well-being of all species and ecosystems. Such moral precepts, rooted in spiritual practices which are passed down through the generations entail a strong commitment to protect biodiversity and the environment. Such a moral ecology serves to promote an effective community-based conservation regime (Torri & Herrmann, 2011).

Magar relationships with ancestral territory

The moral ecology of the Magar is attributed to their relationships and interactions with the lands they consider to be their ancestral territory. The Magars in East Rukum have a belief that they came from the base of Putha mountain in Dopla district, the western part of the Dhaulagiri mountain range. They were nomadic and moved along the route of the Rustam river to Taka village. They understand that a clan group, Budha-Magar, settled for the first time in the neighbouring village, naming it Bachhi Gaon. They have a popular saying passed down from generation to generation: "The forest is our store, the cave is home, the grave is our permanent house". A participant in the focus group at Bachhi Gaon shared, "Our ancestral land is from the habitat of Lophophorus to fish". "Habitats of Lophophorus are the lands of Gharti-Magar (a clan) and habitats of fish are the lands of Budha Magar

(a clan)", added another participant. Thus, they claim their ancestral lands and territories, from high mountains to low valleys, with a sense of ownership and interdependence.

The Magar experience a strong sense of belongingness to the rangelands that they have sustainably managed for centuries. All areas of alpine, sub-alpine and lower pastureland have been named in the Magar language (Kandel, 2000). A herder shared with me several names in the Kham/Magar language for specific rangeland areas, including Fagune, Seng, Surtibang and Ghustang (see Figure 1). The toponyms for pasturelands epitomise the first settlements of Magar ancestors in these places and give contemporary residents a strong sense of collective ownership. For example, during the interviews and focus group discussions with Magar youths, herders and adults, I repeatedly heard such proud pronouncements as "Hamro Kharka (our pasturelands)", "Hamro Pita Purkha (our forefathers)", "Hamro Goths (our herds)" and "Hamro Gaon (our hamlet)". Thus, they have strong experiential and emotional attachments to the rangelands and traditional agro-pastoralism. The herders shared that the rangelands were transferred to their clan groups, and parcels of the lands were owned and controlled by the particular clan groups. These clan groups use the lands collectively without encroaching on each other's areas.

From this series of interviews, I understood that the Magars in Bachhi Gaon and Taka villages have traditional agro-pastoralism as the mainstay of their livelihoods, in the course of which they engage in mobile animal husbandry across different agro-ecological zones. Households of each clan group have herds of sheep, goats, cows and/or buffalos that are moved to high elevations between mid-March and October to take advantage of the spring and summer flush of growth of alpine grasses, then back down to the valleys in late October. The herders in the focus group discussions noted:

"The seasonal movement is important for cattle to protect them from climatic differences and to give a chance for grasses, shrubs and herbs to grow for the livestock. The herds are moved from place to place to make the rangelands fertile to grow many different species of grasses. The wild animals are also dependent on the varieties of grasses in the herding locations."

Customary agro-pastoralism, founded on Magar moral ecology, encourages the coexistence of domestic and wild animal and plant species, which helps to preserve biodiversity. The ethical meanings and beliefs embedded in the rangelands were and are expressed

through sustainable resource management. The strong sense of interdependence with the rangelands shapes Magar interactions with nature. The Magar have a sense of ownership of the rangelands, which represent the socio-ecological geography constitutive of a long-standing Indigenous moral ecology. The rangelands are conceptualised as a biocultural heritage from which they derive their complex moral ecology of management.

Magar traditional institutions for managing agro-pastoralism

The Magars manage their rangelands according to their traditional moral ecology through a particular socio-political system, *Kachahari*. *Kachahari* is a traditional institution of Pun and Gharti Magar communities, which is still practised in the Bachhi Gaon and Taka villages. As the community leader informed me, the *Kachahari* is a religious, cultural and economic institution of the Magars. Every year on 15 June, the community comes together in *Sabapo*, a sacred location near Bachhi Gaon. Formerly, the oldest male community member, known as the *Mukhiya*, takes leadership of the *Kachahari*. Now every year a *Mukhiya* is chosen through a consensus process. This *Mukhiya* can be reappointed the following year if he is judged to have performed his duties well.

Managing agro-pastoralism in the rangelands is one of the main responsibilities of the *Kachahari*. The villagers collectively set restrictions on the usage of rangelands for livestock grazing and determine the best times and places for herd travel. They designate the areas of pasturelands where large and small animals should be grazed separately, as well as the guidelines for gathering fodder. They appoint a *Katuwal*, who notifies every member of the community of the times and specific parcels of rangelands that are permitted or prohibited for cattle grazing. Thus the *Mukhiya* ensures participation of each of the families in the village. Further, the *Katuwal* disseminates other information decided upon under the *Kachahari*. In return, the *Katuwal* receives a certain quantity of food grains from every household, which in 2021–2022 was 2 *Pathis*, (1 *Pathi* = approximately 3 kg), but the amount can vary depending on the decision of the *Kachahari*.

Also, the *Kachahari* designates the *Gwala Mukhiya*, or leader of the herders, who is responsible for monitoring other *Gwalas* (generally male herders), enforcing their compliance with the protocols for grazing livestock. Under *Kachahari*, anyone who exploits restricted rangelands or breaks other guidelines for managing pastoralism faces a fine of up to Rs. 500 (at the time of study). Additionally, the *Gwala Mukhiya* is responsible for rescuing herders and animals that go missing in

the rangelands. In the event of an accident or other disaster, the *Gwala Mukhiya* selects and mobilises community people to carry out the rescue. Based on their performance, the positions of *Katuwal* and *Gwala Mukhiya* are terminated or continued under the *Kachahari*.

Thus, the *Kachahari* is the means by which the Magars preserve, govern and manage the rangelands and agro-pastoralism through the application of a long-standing vernacular set of rules, communal norms and values, and procedures. The customary moral ecology that has been passed down from generation to generation serves as the foundation for the traditional administration of agro-pastoralism. *Kachahari* is a “local management structure which provides rules of use that maintain subsistence and renewal of community resources” (Robbins, 2012, p. 51). It advances the Magar moral ecology of resource management, which stabilises and regulates ecosystem flows and access to resources. In addition to upholding their moral ecology for resource management, under the *Kachahari*, Magars engage in spiritual practices that are directed towards the preservation of nature and biodiversity.

A crisis for Magar moral ecology

However, the rangelands, which consist of grazing lands, forests, barren lands, agricultural lands, bush areas and shrublands, are legally managed by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC, 2020). Thus the Magars co-exist with Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation managers and the associated formal regime of legislation, policies and plans. The *Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve Management Plan 2019*, the most recent plan, fails to recognise the conservation effectiveness of Magar agro-pastoralism by restricting the grazing of animals inside the reserve. While the *Himalayan National Park Rules 1979* allow herders to pasture animals and access resources, this is contingent on them obtaining written consent from the reserve warden. In the late 1990s, such permission required the herders to move cattle to the *Buki* (highland pasture where alpine grasses predominate) from mid-May to the end of August, even though the traditional cattle grazing season runs from mid-March to mid-October (Kandel, 2000). This restricted access to the *Buki* dismantled the traditional herding structure.

Following this disruption, overgrazing has caused the introduction of invasive species, the destruction of wildlife habitats, soil compaction and exposure, the transfer of diseases, displacement of Blue Sheep, and harm to natural regeneration (DHRO, 2019). However, the response in the plan has not been to restore the

Magar regime, but rather to further compromise Magar agro-pastoralism by prohibiting activities such as collecting firewood, fodder, timber and wild foods, and preventing small-scale farming that are essential for maintaining traditional practices. Women interviewees from each village noted:

“We are not allowed to collect firewood, wild vegetables (mushrooms and nettles, etc.), herbal plants, fodder, and even the dry leaves and logs buried under snow and flooded by the river. At one time, I applied to collect logs for firewood, but the reserve officer refused.”

In a series of focus group discussions in both villages, the herders collectively agreed:

“The practices of livestock keeping and the number of sheep and cows in the herds are decreasing and only a few households run a few herds with few livestock. The Magars, nowadays, are uncertain about the future of keeping livestock because of the restrictions of DHR on accessing resources. Many of them are selling their livestock or keeping lower numbers.”

In the interviews, several herders noted that their activities were strictly monitored by security forces and rangers. As an Assistant Warden of DHR warned:

“There is maximum encroachment of lands at Taka, Dhorpatan and Gurjaghat areas from where we remove the huts/cow sheds and crops mobilizing armies if the local people neglect the notice we have previously given.”

In the late 1990s, there were 716 households in the Taksera Village Development Committee (VDC) area, with 31,217 associated livestock (the highest number in the East Rukum VDCs) (Kandel, 2000). However, in the four East Rukum VDCs (Ranmamaikot, Hukam, Taksera and Kakri) there were only 30,130 livestock by the late 2010s (DHRO, 2019). This indicates a sharp decline in agro-pastoral practices in Bachhi Gaon and Taka villages. As is the case in many high-mountain protected areas, this decline has been driven by factors such as migration out of the region, tourism development and conservation policies (Tiwari et al., 2020), and in Dhorpatan the pressure brought to bear by the reserve managers has also been significant.

Conservation plans and practices have effectively controlled the management of agro-pastoralism, thereby weakening those customary moral ecologies upheld by traditional governance systems. Coercive conservation regimes have denied agro-pastoralism communities the right to exercise their autonomy and self-determination

in regards to resource management (Robbins, 2012). This has not only tended to undermine traditional resource constraints but also diminished the ethical accountability of the Magar for sustainable agro-pastoral management, thereby creating a crisis for their long-standing moral ecology. Advocacy documents of Magar activists show that the right to self-determination of IPs as a global framing of Indigenous rights motivates them to resist the injustice of the current conservation regime. However, such a view of global order is inadequately translated into reality since the framework of international law is weak and at the local level governments may pay little heed to the provisions of international agreements.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines the customary moral ecology of managing agro-pastoralism among the Magar Indigenous peoples in East Rukum, Nepal. It argues that Magar moral ecology and associated practices are in crisis due to the failure of conservation policies and plans to recognise their value and significance. State-led conservation contributes to the crisis of a deeply ingrained, intricate Indigenous moral ecology for managing agro-pastoralism. The Magars' strong sense of ownership, belonging and dependency in relation to the rangelands underpins complex relationships which are expressed through long-standing sustainable practices. Magar moral ecology not only maintains symbiotic relationships between humans and non-humans, but also fosters coexistence of domestic and wild animals and plant species. In addition, the traditional institutions uphold an agro-pastoralism regime that is deeply rooted in spiritual practices and fosters a sense of responsibility for the preservation of biodiversity and the natural world. Recognition of the need for Indigenous peoples' self-governance and self-determination in managing rangelands and agro-pastoralism based on a customary moral ecology is of central importance for long-term sustainable and rights-based management of the DHR. A change of approach on the part of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation is needed to bring this about.

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RESUMEN

En anteriores estudios de ecología política se ha analizado la vulnerabilidad del pastoralismo y los conflictos entre las áreas protegidas y los medios de subsistencia de los pastores. Algunos regímenes de conservación consideran que las instituciones, los conocimientos, el autogobierno y la autodeterminación de los pastores indígenas son incompatibles con la conservación contemporánea, alegando que las prácticas asociadas son insostenibles. Este artículo, basado en la etnografía crítica, examina la ecología moral del agropastoreo indígena en la Reserva de Caza de Dhorpatan, en el medio oeste de Nepal. La gestión tradicional en Magar está en crisis debido a las políticas y prácticas de la reserva. Desde una perspectiva de ecología política, demuestro que la ecología moral tradicional del agropastoreo mantiene relaciones complejas con los pastizales. Las instituciones tradicionales sostienen una ecología moral profundamente arraigada en las prácticas espirituales y fomentan un sentido de responsabilidad por la conservación de la biodiversidad y la naturaleza. Las políticas de conservación actuales no reconocen adecuadamente estos principios morales indígenas y debilitan las relaciones socioecológicas armoniosas. Para gestionar las zonas protegidas de forma sostenible en las regiones de gran altitud, es crucial gestionar el agropastoralismo en el marco de la ecología moral tradicional a través del autogobierno y la autodeterminación de los pueblos indígenas.

RÉSUMÉ

Des études antérieures d'écologie politique ont exploré la vulnérabilité du pastoralisme et les conflits entre les zones protégées et les moyens de subsistance des pasteurs. Certains régimes de conservation considèrent les institutions, les connaissances, l'autogouvernance et l'autodétermination des pasteurs indigènes comme incompatibles avec la conservation contemporaine, au motif que les pratiques associées ne sont pas durables. Sur la base d'une ethnographie critique, cet article examine l'écologie morale de l'agropastoralisme Magar indigène dans la réserve de chasse de Dhorpatan, dans le centre-ouest du Népal. La gestion traditionnelle des Magars est en crise en raison des politiques et des pratiques de la réserve. Dans une perspective d'écologie politique, je montre que l'écologie morale traditionnelle de l'agro-pastoralisme entretient des relations complexes avec les terres de parcours. Les institutions traditionnelles soutiennent une écologie morale qui est profondément enracinée dans les pratiques spirituelles et qui favorise un sentiment de responsabilité pour la préservation de la biodiversité et de la nature. Les politiques de conservation actuelles ne reconnaissent pas suffisamment ces principes moraux autochtones et affaiblissent les relations socio-écologiques harmonieuses. Afin de gérer durablement les zones protégées dans les régions de haute altitude, il est essentiel de gérer l'agro-pastoralisme dans le cadre de l'écologie morale traditionnelle par le biais de l'autogouvernance et de l'autodétermination des peuples autochtones.