



Wildlife Tourism and South Africa's Rural Crisis: Creating 'Wilderness' and Restructuring Social Relations in the Context of Land Reform

Speaker: **Assoc Professor Shirley Brooks**
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Chair: **Assoc Professor TC Chang**
Department of Geography, NUS

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Place: Earth Lab (AS2 #02-03), Department of Geography, NUS

Abstract

This paper explores contemporary cultural geographies and underlying histories of change on private land in post-apartheid South Africa. Its focus is the expansion of wildlife-based tourism and related forms of commodified wilderness consumption in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The paper explores the social and economic processes occurring on game farms. Here 'nature' is being culturally (re)constructed on former farmlands to create new landscapes shaped by the demands of wildlife-based tourism.

In pursuit of these goals, spaces often need to be physically changed as well as discursively repositioned through marketing. Yet this is not an unchallenged process: the presence of farm dwellers (often former labour tenants or farm workers) living on privately owned land disrupts smooth progress to a refashioned wilderness landscape. The paper explores farm owners' and farm dwellers' very different relations to the land, and discusses the various strategies employed by landowners in order to minimise or eliminate the presence of farm dwellers.



In the current political context, the involvement of the state on private land adds a further layer of complexity, as state land reform policies and programmes serve as a mesh through which these contestations are filtered.

About the Speaker



Shirley Brooks is based at the University of the Western Cape, where she is Associate Professor in the Department of Geography, Environmental Studies & Tourism. A human geographer whose work is located at the nature-culture interface, she has a long standing research interest in the colonial and post-colonial politics of wildlife conservation and associated land issues in South Africa. She was a team leader in a decade-long research project on the social impacts of land conversions from conventional agriculture to so-called 'wilderness' landscapes (game farms, private game reserves and so on); a development related to the insecurity of white farmers as well as the expansion of the tourism sector after the end of apartheid. She is currently working on a book manuscript about the history of nature conservation in the east coast province of KwaZulu-Natal.

ADMISSION IS FREE – ALL ARE WELCOME

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