

RECOVERING VOICES

Seminar Series in Endangered Languages and Indigenous Knowledge



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presents:

Shepherds at the Crossroads

Thursday May 18, 2017, 12:00-1:00pm
Rose Room, NMNH

Humans have practiced transhumance for thousands of years -- herding livestock across different regions during seasonal migrations. Pastoralism helps cultivate natural landscapes and fosters the proliferation of indigenous plants while also preventing soil erosion. In recent years, pastoralists have had to respond to new environmental and economic challenges. In Germany, the heavy use of slurry in agriculture has resulted in shepherds not being able to let the sheep graze along traditional migratory routes. Most shepherds who used to migrate seasonally have had to give up this practice within the past few years, effectively abandoning a long-lived cultural and professional tradition. In many places, an increase in desertification and the privatization of formerly public land decreases grazing areas for pastoralists.

These environmental challenges have led to the formation of new transnational alliances among European pastoralists, including the formation of the European Shepherds Network. The group has organized conferences that were attended by pastoralists from numerous European countries; attendees demanded greater recognition of the environmental benefits of pastoralism and protested EU legislation that regulates animal husbandry. German herders are also in conversation with herders from other parts of the world -- Mongolia, the Sahara region, South Asia, and Scandinavia. This research, which is based on preliminary fieldwork conducted in Germany in summer 2016, examines how shepherds in Germany talk about their professions, and how they frame their own traditions and struggles in comparison to those of herders from other countries.

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An initiative by the National Museum of Natural History,
in collaboration with the National Museum of the American Indian
and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

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Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
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