

Farmers' beliefs on a higher plain

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There's more to decisions about land use than climate change, population growth, migration and prosperous economies. In the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco, individual religious beliefs in local Saints are also linked to how the Amazig (Berber) people use their environment and manage local resources. These findings¹ by Dr. Pablo Dominguez from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in Spain, and his colleagues, published online in Springer's journal *Human Ecology*, suggest that the new economic strategy used as belief has weakened is more individualistic and generates shorter term benefits compared with the old Saints' philosophy promoting communal management and long-term benefits.

To date, researchers have paid limited attention to the role of individual [religious beliefs](#) in the processes of change in the management of territory and communal natural resources. Dominguez and his colleagues use the High Atlas in Morocco as a case study to shed some light on the relationship between individual beliefs in local Islamic Saints and the changing use of managed pastures. Historically, the Amazig people have followed a traditional form of common property management based on the prohibition (called Agdal) of access to common pastures, mainly in the Spring, in order to obtain better grazing at the beginning of summer. This Agdal prohibition period is deeply rooted in long-held religious beliefs and practices.

Through a combination of participant observation and interviews over a period of 12 months between 2003 and 2008, as well as a survey of 80 households in the village of Warzazt, Dominguez and team demonstrate

a relationship between the abandonment of traditional beliefs in Saints and agricultural expansion and the introduction of a new breed of sheep (cross-bred Sardi) in particular.

The authors conclude: "Our findings add religious beliefs to the list of factors that change as natural resource utilization changes be it for [climate change](#), population increase, migration, technical advances or economical reasons. What our study highlights is that individual religious beliefs, or lack of them, can also be an important element in the use of agro-pastural resources."

More information: Dominguez P et al (2010). Relationships between religious beliefs and mountain pasture uses: a case study in the High Atlas mountains of Marrakech, Morocco. Human Ecology; [DOI 10.1007/s10745-010-9321-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-010-9321-7)

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