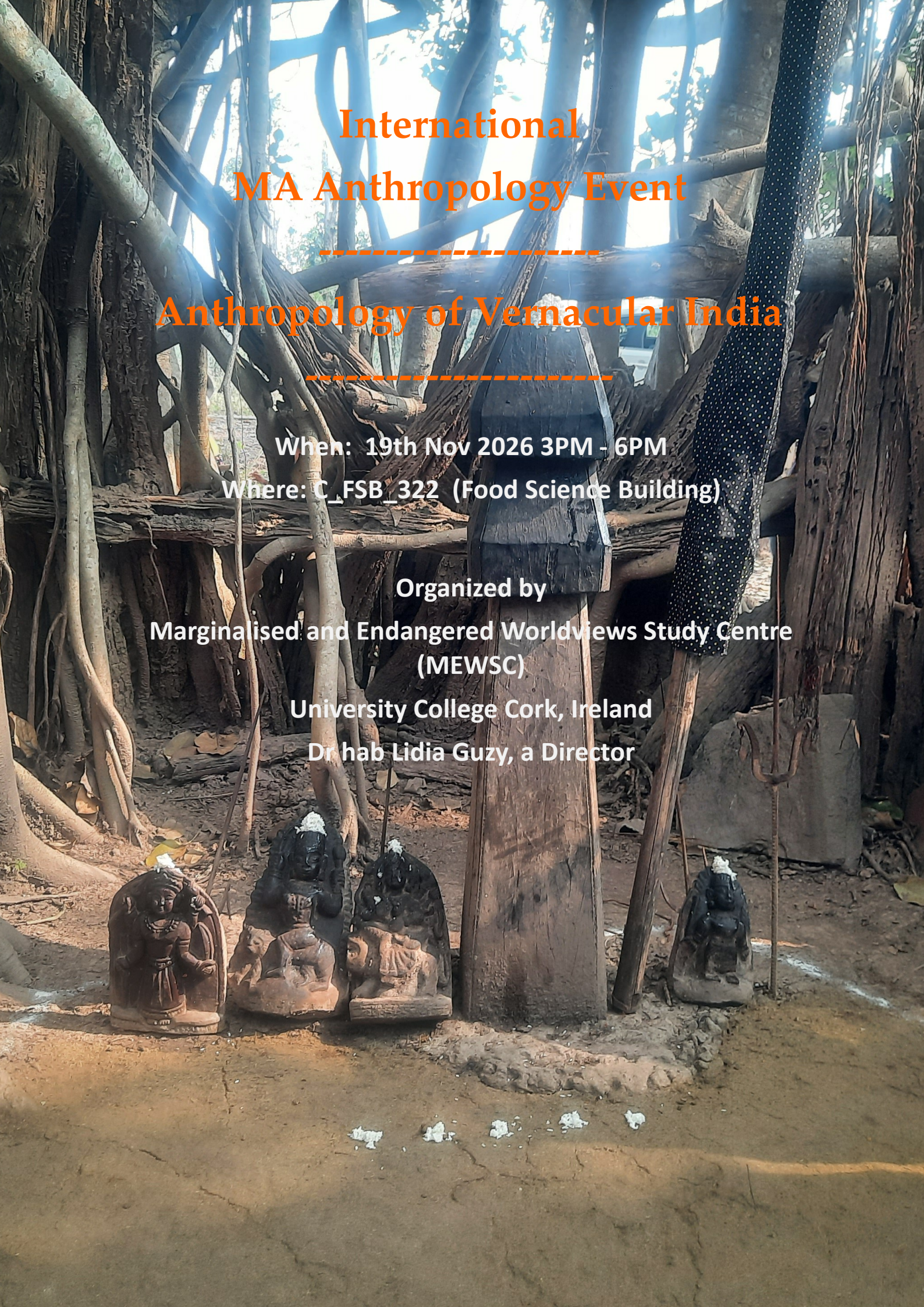


International MA Anthropology Event

Anthropology of Vernacular India

When: 19th Nov 2026 3PM - 6PM

Where: C_FSB_322 (Food Science Building)

Organized by

Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre (MEWSC)

University College Cork, Ireland

Dr hab Lidia Guzy, a Director

3-3:15 pm Student-led Introduction, Discussion and Chairing

Treasure and Magic from Another India: A Venice curation experience, Rachel Foley, BA Anthropology, UCC

A brief historic Introduction to Adivasi Lands, Marcel Zak, MA Anthropology, UCC

Eoin Burke, Discussant, Chair, BA Anthropology

3:15 -4:15pm: The riddle of the crane: Multispecies coexistence and the case of Dhanauri (Uttar Pradesh, India)



Stefano Beggiora, Ca'Foscari Venice, Italy

Chair: Marcel Zak

Metaphor of unconditional love, devotion, empathy and compassion, the giant Indian crane, or Sarus Crane, is a topos of Indian literature: its song is capable of evoking the plots of an aesthetic, lyrical and spiritual search. Sung in epic and myth, this animal today stands as a symbol of Environmental Humanities in India, despite its increasingly threatened conservation status. This article focuses on the case of Dhanauri Wetlands, illustrating the complexity of multispecies coexistence between endangered animals and a human society in full transformation. The Dhanauri oasis, not yet officially recognized as a protected 'Ramsar' site, stands as a bastion of environmentalism in a paradigmatic struggle for resilience against the rampant urbanization and industrialization of the Indian doab.
FULL ARTICLE (download): https://ojs.unito.it/index.php/kervan/article/view/12052/10032
DOI: https://doi.org/10.13135/1825-263X/12052

BIO: Stefano Beggiora (Ph.D. in Civilizations of India and East Asia) is Associate Professor of Indian History, Environmental History and Humanities of India, History of Medieval Hindi Literature and Ethnography of Shamanism at the Dept. of Asian and North African Studies ofthe Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Specialized in the study of Asian shamanism, he has carried out more than twenty years of research among indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities mainly of the Indian subcontinent. He has published several books and scien-tific articles on the history and religions of the native (adivasi) communities of India, but also on the human rights of minorities, contemporary politics, economics and international relations in Asia. He is currently director of the STRADE series dedicated to anthropological and religious studies edited by Franco Angeli in Milan and of the international scientific review Lagoonscapes, The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities.
Stefano can be contacted at: stefano.beggiora@unive.it

4:15-5:15pm: Boil (Boli Yatra) in Odisha: Possession, power and play



Uwe Skoda, Aarhus Unviersity, Denmark

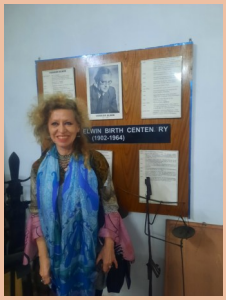
Chair: Eoin Burke, UCC

The paper introduces the Boil ritual in Western Odisha in a royal framework and focuses specifically on the vario us verbal and non-verbal forms of communication with the divine.
Firstly, the broader framework of the ritual and involved actors will be presented - including goddess manifested through a possessed medium known as Barua and belonging to an indigenous community, the king as patron, but also the Brahmin as officiating priest. Celebrated across different localities in the region, this ritual idiom is deeply embedded in the ritual calendar and eco-cosmology especially of the indigenous communities e.g. the Gonds and Bhuiyans. Yet, Boil also attracts other devotees who seek help from the goddess by approaching her and hoping for a verbal response from a capricious deity. Secondly, the paper will zoom in on the relationship between king and goddess being his tutelary deity (*ishta debi*). The king has not only privileged access to the goddess, but she trains him publicly how to use the sword. Through this "sword play" a special bond between king and goddess is re-enacted and visiblized: the goddess is empowering and protecting the king, while simultaneously the distinction between *raja* and *praja*, ruler and subjects, is re-produced, which, however, is at odds with the formal abolition of kingship in post-independent India.

BIO: Uwe Skoda is associate professor for India and South Asia studies at the Department of Global Studies, Aarhus University, Denmark. He is focusing on the one hand on visual culture—including photography—and on the other hand on political anthropology—including transformations of kingship and the state and domestic politics in India broadly.

He conducted extensive fieldwork in Odisha / Middle India and worked with indigenous communities. His current research project titled Constructing the Ocean: Indian Ocean Infrastructures and Thick Transregionalism of the Dawoodi Bohras (CO-OC) shifted the focus to western India, community-driven infrastructures and transoceanic connections. His books include Bonding with the Lord. Jagannath, Popular Culture and Community Formation (coedited with Jyotirmaya Tripathy, Bloomsbury, 2019); India and its Visual Cultures: Community, Class and Gender in a Symbolic Landscape (coedited with Birgit Lettmann, Sage, 2018).

5:15-6pm: Trance, Spirit Possession and Healing in Tribal Adivasi India



Lidia Guzy, University College Cork, Ireland

Chair: Rachel Foley

This presentation examines the role of Trance and Trance mediumship as crucial cultural medium for the understanding of indigenous ontologies as alternative philosophies of being.
Trance mediumship, possession or embodiment are cultural idioms/tropes representing an intimate contact with the non-empirical world. As a cultural idiom for ritual communication and expression it signifies an indigenous, vernacular concept of power, therapy and technique of healing.
The paper will present several examples of trans mediumship within the tribal Adivasi context of East and Middle India relating to boil – goddess embodiment in Odisha, borua – trance specialists in Chhattisgarh and Nag bacca – literally "the snake children" –a local shamanic trance and possession tradition in Odisha.

BIO: Lidia Guzy is a social anthropologist, anthropologist of music and scientist of religions, specialising on South Asia and Latin America. Lidia Guzy is working in the areas of endangered intangible cultural heritage, indigenous cultures, globalisation and the performative arts (music and dance), religion, society and eco-criticism discourses.
Currently Dr Hab Guzy is MA Anthropology Programme Director and Associate Professor in South Asian and Indigenous Religions at University College Cork, National University of Ireland. Lidia Guzy is also a Director of the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre (MEWSC) at UCC where she focuses on the global study of indigenous worldviews and lived traditions. She is also a Privatdozent (honorary professor) at Freie Universitaet Berlin, Study of Religions Department and was Visiting Professor in Anthropology (2016) at Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès, France, Visiting Research Fellow (2022-2024) at Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak (M.P.) IGNTU, India, a Visiting Scholar (2025) at THE NEW INSTITUTE, Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE) at Ca'Foscari University, Venice, Italy and Visiting Professor at Universidad del Rosario, Bogota, Colombia (2026).
Lidia Guzy holds a bi-national PhD in Social Anthropology from Freie Universität Berlin, Germany (2002) and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) (2003), Paris (thèse en co-tutelle). In 2011 she obtained her Habilitation at the Faculty of Cultural and Historical Studies, in the field of Study of Religions, at Freie Universität (FU) Berlin and since 2011. Dr Guzy teaches and researches at the University College Cork, Study of Religions Department, Ireland.

At present, based on comparisons between Asia and Latin America, Dr Guzy researches indigenous knowledge systems and eco-cosmologies as paths to local and global sustainability.