The distinction between nature and culture and the relationship of both to human action/behavior underpins a great deal of theorizing in the human, social and biological sciences. The presumed separation of nature and culture not only underwrites common ideas of human adaptation and behavioral ecology but also, in various guises, gives rise to descendent theories of cultural ecology, systems theory and more recently complexity theory and resilience thinking. At the other end of the intellectual spectrum humanistic approaches favoring cultural perception, structural and symbolic systems, agency, phenomenology and practice often rely in-part on the same distinction to prioritize the ‘cultural’ over the biophysical. More recently still, emerging theories of affect and materiality (such as ANT), continue to grapple with this basic conundrum: how do humans affect the world and how does it affect them; to what extent do humans react or respond to the world and to what extent do they shape it; and through what mechanisms do these processes occur: perception and cognition, tradition, history, habitus, optimal thinking, rationality? The challenge appears to be how we break down this clearly false dichotomy between nature and culture while retaining our ability to analyze cause and effect in the material world inhabited by non-material consciousness.

To what extent ‘bio-cultural frontiers’ (juxtaposing the biological and the cultural) represents a new departure in this debate or a re-hashing of old concepts remains to be seen; however, a rather different way to approach this conundrum may be not to focus on how to problematise the nature-culture concept, but rather to think about how this idea arose in the first place; how did we come to have the idea that nature and culture are separate? I argue that the work of two theorists may be useful here; Ian Hodder’s examination of the process of Neolithisation in Europe some 5000-8000 years ago (The Domestication of Europe, 1990) argued that the transition to farming - the process of domestication - was not just a physical transformation, the introduction of domestic crops and animals, but also a cognitive revolution which involved the re-classification of the world into new categories; domestic and non-domestic; nature and culture. Domestication is therefore not the process through which we ‘tame’ or transform nature, but rather the process through which we come to believe that we have tamed something separate which becomes called nature. Tim Ingold (Perception of the Environment, 2000) similarly argues for this separation of nature and culture as a longstanding imagined relationship that we (especially westerners) have with the world, but points out that it rarely perfectly matches actual lived experience which he refers to as ‘dwelling’. Both writers point to the way in which objectification of the natural environment is a historical process which occurs and re-occurs in various formats and at various points and places in human history and which emerges neither from responses to the world (environmental determinism) or from the conscious imposition of human ideals on the world (cultural determinism), but rather through practical daily action, which always involves the recursive conscious and unconscious interaction of mind and matter. The key, here then is perhaps not to focus on breaking down the nature-culture dichotomy in our approaches, but rather to analyze how and where different subject communities have developed (or not) their own similar imagined (historically contextual) relationships with the
world and to focus on the embodied daily, annual and longer-term temporal actions in the world through which these ideals emerge and change.

The agricultural landscape of the Marakwet in northwest Kenya is a ‘domesticated landscape’ par excellence with topography, water, soils and vegetation all shaped by human hands. Yet this ‘domestication’ is far from simply physical; the land is imagined as a human body and dissected and used on the basis of kinship and complex human relationships. This paper begins to examine whether and (if so) how the Marakwet come to objectify the world in which they live (domesticating it?) and how these understandings both impact and derive from daily life as part of the physical/material world.