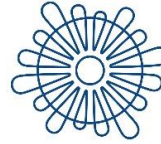




Institut d'ethnologie méditerranéenne,
Européenne et Comparative



Aix-Marseille
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PILNET (Pilgrimage Studies Network) of EASA

Aix-Marseille University, Idemec, CNRS

University of Zadar, Department of Ethnology and Anthropology

PILNET 2021 Workshop, Aix-en-Provence

24th-25th September 2021

Pilgrimages in Times of Pandemics Crises, Regulations, Innovations

Pilgrimages are affected by the coronavirus pandemic at different scales, from local to global levels. The present call aims at developing collective reflection on this worldwide phenomenon based on ethnographic and/or historical data.

We propose some research axes:

Diachronic perspectives. Pilgrimages and pandemics share a long and common history. Several scholarly studies have shown that pilgrims' circulations and gatherings have often been vectors of virus propagation (from medieval plagues to Spanish flu or 2002–2004 SARS). Therefore, and paradoxically, sacred places – believed to be centres of cure and healing – can also become potential hubs for viral contamination. Nowadays the emergence of Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) has refocused attention on the relationship between pilgrimages and epidemics. Are we witnessing a simple resurgence of phenomena known in the past but partly forgotten, or are there specificities in the current crisis?

Politics, regulations, resistances. A notable consequence of pandemics is the deep impact on pilgrimage economies and religious tourism. How are institutions responding to lowered incomes? At the political level, what regulations, restrictions and specific devices do they implement? How do religious institutions manage the articulation between pragmatism and theological principles? The role of states is also crucial (lockdowns, limited gauges, closed borders...). Another dimension relates to believers or pilgrims who claim the right to transgress sanitary rules.

Ritualization, choreography of void. This point concerns the pilgrimage in itself and the transformations caused by the virus. Pilgrimage centres are generally based on a semantic of plenitude (affluence, crowd, effervescence...) but in times of epidemics or pandemics, they become empty spaces, perhaps more propitious to contemplation. With Covid-19, one can even observe the voluntary “staging” of emptiness and the choreography of void. To what extent do pandemics affect the grammar of pilgrimage by accentuating individualistic involvement and

modifying the balance between the travel and the gathering at the shrine? Furthermore, what new rituals are initiated, and how is rituality altered under lockdown? For example, how do masks and social distancing change the pilgrim *habitus*?

Participations and subjectivities. In our digital era and in the absence of crowds, what technological innovations are proposed to encourage remote people participation? How do pilgrimage centres operate through mediatisation and virtualisation, for instance, through ceremonies on TV or social networks. Another issue concerns the balance between risk and trust, i.e. between the physical and spiritual benefits, and the risk of becoming contaminated.

Methodological aspects. How to carry out ethnographic research at empty sacred spaces in times of pandemic times, especially when we cannot enter shrines because of lockdown? To what extent does the health context change our approach of fieldwork and imply adjustments in research strategy (tools, devices, digital networks...)?

Invited speaker:

John Eade (Roehampton University)

Location:

Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme (MMSH)
Aix-en-Provence, France

Convenors

Dionigi Albera, Idemec, CNRS, Aix-Marseille University
Manoël Pénicaud, Idemec, CNRS, Aix-Marseille University
Mario Katić, Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, University of Zadar

Practical information

Applications should be sent to Manoël Pénicaud on manoelpenicaud@gmail.com by March 31st 2021, the decision about the accepted applications will be by April 30th 2021.

The number of the participants will be limited.

The application should consist of a short sketch of the applicant's academic work and an abstract of the proposed paper. The length of the abstract should be between 500 and 1000 words.

The organizers will cover daily lunch, coffee breaks and a field excursion.

Accommodation and travel costs will not be covered.

NB: This workshop will follow another conference on "Pilgrimage and the Politics of Presence and Absence: Anthropological Horizons on Sacralizing Locality, Visibility and Invisibility in the Contemporary World", organised by Simon Coleman and Evgenia Mesaritou on September 23, in the same location. The participants of the workshop "Pilgrimages in Times of Pandemics. Crises, Regulations, Innovations" will also be able to attend this other workshop.

These two events are part of the 2021 PILNET MEETING (Aix-en-Provence, September 23-25, 2021).