

Ritual Journeys



Universität Heidelberg

IWH 30.07 – 1.08. 2012

John Eade (University College London/University of Roehampton)

(Re)Constructing Pilgrimage in a Changing Europe

Transnational migration is changing not only the political economy of Europe but also its religious (material and imagined) landscape. This process involves not just new religious minorities but also established religious institutions which have played crucial roles in constructing national majorities during the last two hundred years at least. Pilgrimage is playing a key part in the interweaving of religious, national and transnational landscapes. Research is beginning to explore this interrelationship through the study of particular pilgrimage journeys and shrines but there is a need to locate these pilgrimages within the changes taking place across Europe. This paper will seek to provide an overview of these developments and suggest the directions research might take in the future.

Daniel H. Olsen (Brandon University)

Ritual Journeys in North America: Opening Religious and Ritual Landscapes and Spaces

The religious landscape in North America is different from other regions of the world in that not only is there a lack of a highly visible religious landscape, but also the idea and practice of pilgrimage and ritual travel is not as pervasive as in Europe and Asia. However, there are many human-built and natural spaces marked by Roman Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Aboriginal peoples, and members of other faiths which are subject to either formal or informal pilgrimage-like travel. Visits to these sacred sites have intensified with the rise and expansion of tourism after World War 2, conflating pilgrimage-like travel with tourism. As such, there has been an expansion of the term “pilgrimage” to describe the visits of people to sites of historical, political and/or pop culture importance. This paper examines the changing religious and ritual landscapes in North America, and examines the case of tourism and pilgrimage to martyr’s shrine in Midland, Ontario, to show how ritual journeys in North America have become more exclusive over time.

Christoph Bergmann (University of Heidelberg | SAI (Anthropology))

Between Politics and Poetics: on Ritual Journeys in the Kumaon Himalaya

This paper examines the significance of ritual journeying for British frontier operations and Sino-Indian border negotiations in the Kumaon Himalaya. It is argued that inventive state actors adopted ritual journeys as a method for gathering geographical knowledge, exercising long distance control and justifying territorial sovereignty. The argument is substantiated by three empirical cases: William Moorcroft’s travel to Tibet in 1812; the surveys of native explorers (*Pundits*) during the second half of the 19th century; and the creation of legal evidence for the Indo-Tibetan boundary line during the 1950s. It is shown that local residents – the so-called ‘Bhotiyas’ – have actively participated in these broader developments without falling victim to them. Moreover, they constantly innovated their own ritual techniques in order to assure the mobility of certain agents (human and non-human) within shifting navigational contexts.

Christian Krug (Independent Scholar)

Parikrama – the Pilgrim’s Path around a River

In the heart of the Indian subcontinent the river Narmada flows over 1300 kilometers from East to West. Thousands of people undertake the arduous way around the river every year. For some of them the circumambulation takes three years and more, others try to complete the Parikrama in 108 days. Most pilgrims carry just a few utensils with them, since all of them hope for the grace of the river and the help of people living on her bank. There is no real starting point, nor end - the only goal is to reach ones beginning and then to leave the circle. The whole Parikrama is like a reflection of life.

I spent a couple of times at the Narmada and walked hundreds of kilometers on its riverbank. I met holy men (Sadhus) who did the Parikrama twice and villagers who share their puny belongings with the pilgrims. I will describe one of the last real pilgrim’s paths where no signboard shows the way, where it is necessary to ask small children for the right direction and where one wonders every evening if and where one can find a place to sleep.

I will also will talk about some dangerous developments for this cultural heritage also responsible for a big tragedy in India: the constructions of dams which do not only destroy the environment of hundreds of thousands of people, mainly tribals, but also the pilgrimage-infrastructure along the river Narmada which has grown over centuries.

Swarupa Gupta (Presidency University, Calcutta)

Ritual Journeys and the Idea of India: Colonial and Postcolonial Times

This paper explores multiple facets of ritual journeys as reflected in Bengali literary and historical works. It seeks to show how these facets exhibit both inclusive (pilgrim centres and routes open to various people and social communities) and exclusive (sequestered pilgrimage units where a set of people seal off boundaries) features. I argue that despite oscillations between these two types, there were trans-regional pilgrim pathways criss-crossing India as evident in the works of Jadunath Sarbadhikary, Baradaprasad Basu and Jogendranath Roy (Cf. Morinis: 1984 and Feldhaus: 2003). The paper aims to show how ritual journeys fostered a sense of nationhood and an idea of India. These religious-nationalist connections or interfaces between pilgrims of different regions were strengthened by melās such as the Tārakeśvar melā which drew ‘low’ groups, e.g. Nayeks, and both Hindus and Muslims. Literary texts or visual representations such as Samaresh Basu’s (alias Kalkut’s) Amṛta kumbher sandhāne (1982) deal with the dynamics of the Kumbh melā.

I connect the model of the melā with other disseminative and participatory aspects of trans-regional processions and the practice of yātrā. The latter, meaning worship of God, dated back to Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstrā, and formed the basis of all drama in India. Yātrā meant both religious journey, as well as plays which drew their themes from the purāṇas and the epics. The melās and ritual journeys were strongly connected to materialities, economic processes, and political dynamics. Religion travelled from the ‘inner’ to the ‘outer’, public domain. Visits to divine destinations reflected intersections between the sacred and the secular. Through the prism of the literary and historical works such as Shanku Maharaj’s Bigalita karuṇā jāhnaī yamunā, and Amar tīrtha amarnāth; Abadhut’s Marutīrtha himglāj; and the works of Samaresh Basu, I try to explore how far a nationalist pilgrim-cartography of India persisted despite (1) erosion of cultural specificities in the wake of globalisation; and (2) the exclusivist turn in ritual journeys.

are typically understood as work for the gods. This work is to be taken serious (and is nowadays paid for) as a service for the community – it maintains good relationships between the people and their deities. However, much in contrary to many western religious traditions, that does not imply that ritual work may not contain aspects of humorous theatrical performance, in the contrary, the humour seems to be an integral part of these ritual performances. The case study I will explore shows that no distinction is made between sacred work, entertaining performance, honour, devotion and satire. The ritual performances which caught my attention are part of the divine pilgrimage of the godking Jakh in the Garhwal Himalayas, a border region between Tibet and India in the state of Uttarakhand, India in the Central Himalayas. When the godking Jakh is on pilgrimage, he is not only accompanied by his priests, servants and musicians but also by an entourage of masks and performers who will entertain him and the villagers at night. The leading figure during these nightly performances is Burhdeva, also called Narad. A trickster figure who introduces the other deities onto the stage, dances and sings for the deity, recalls important events of previous days, evaluates the villages' generosity in welcoming the deity and his servants and relives the life of an ordinary villager in a satirical way. These performances are deeply religious, yet full of self-irony. At times the audience roars with laughter only to be moved to tears by the sadness of Narad's life or to tremble in fright as the goddess Kali dances on stage demanding a sacrifice of blood lest she's take one of them. The whole performance is thoroughly enjoyed by Garhwali villagers, yet it is considered necessary work for the deity – as the purpose of the ritual is to pacify him, the protector of their land and wellbeing.

Premakumara De Silva

(Professor, Head of Department of Sociology, University of Colombo)

‘Our ‘Boss’ to Worship by Us’: Youth and Youth Religiosity in a Popular Pilgrimage Site in Sri Lanka

Youth constitute a fascinating site for exploring issues of religious and non-religious behaviours, experiences and cultural transmission, in general. How sociologists and anthropologists have neglected the supporting and active role of young people within society has been abundantly emphasized (Bucholtz 2002; Durham 2000). From this small but growing body of knowledge, it is clear that anthropology is particularly well situated to offer an account of how young people around the world produce, contest, and negotiate cultural forms. Following this line of argument my inquiry on youth participation in the Sri Pāda (Adam's Peak) pilgrimage is based on two basic anthropological and Sociological questions: what do young people do when they come to Sri Pāda? What do they say about their journey to Sri Pāda? By inquiring those questions I want to show how youth studies can provide crucial insights into our understanding both religious and non-religious behaviours of youth in the age of globalization.

The “youth pilgrims”, like other pilgrims come to Sri Pāda to worship and to ask for help. But as I will explain in my paper, their “sacred” intentions are equally combined with the achievement of maximum pleasure. Both the pleasurable and the religious dimensions of these specific pilgrim groups have been explored through the accounts of personal experiences (e.g., through case studies and memories of pilgrims). These “youth pilgrims” visit Sri Pāda with different motivations and intentions, both “religious” and “secular”. My point here is that both religious attainment and non-religious experiences are equally important when understanding the behavior of pilgrim groups in general and youth groups in particular, at a popular religious site like Sri Pāda.

Simon Coleman (Center of the Study of Religion, Toronto)

The Memory of the Glance: Walsingham and the Articulation of the Inclusive

The title of this paper draws on two theoretical metaphors. First, Georgia Frank's *The Memory of the Eyes*, an exploration of the role of the senses in early Christian travel to Egypt; and second, David Chaney's articulation of the notion of the tourist glance. I apply these concepts to an analysis of pilgrimage to the English Christian site of Walsingham. Over the past century, Walsingham has moved from being an obscure, little-known place of pilgrimage for Roman and Anglo-Catholics into being a centre of national heritage and tourism. What has this shift meant for the kind of pilgrimage practised at the site? And how might we see Walsingham as providing a ritual paradigm for forms of practice that extend what we think of as participation in pilgrimage, or even engagement in religion as a whole?

Jürgen David (Initiativ Kolleg, University of Vienna)

In Fear of the Past: The Pilgrimage to Badrīnāth in Perspective.

The temple of Badrīnāth has been an important pilgrimage center since the 8th century, dedicated to the Hindu god Viṣṇu, and is located deep in the Garhwal Himalaya alongside a former important trade route into Tibet. Being one of the four Dhāms, it was not only an outpost of Hinduism, but at the same time was situated in the midst of local traditions. Thus there are two different sets of narratives competing with each other. One is based on the purāṇic lore and upheld by the priests and is therefore widely known to the pilgrims. The other one is mainly based on local narratives which inter alia put the temple's history within the sphere of Buddhist heritage. With the increasing inflow of pilgrims to the Himalayan shrines, namely in the last 60 years, the set of narratives of the priests has slowly gained ground over the local ones. Also an act issued by the British in 1939, bringing European ideas of enlightenment into the temple, thus significantly influencing the cultural setting. Today these local narratives can still be found in local pamphlets but are considered mere tales. Yet they still play a role when it comes to encounters with other religions and local practices.

The paper will show that as the pilgrimage to Badrīnāth became more popular and open to all castes and creeds, local deities and shrines were incorporated into the sacred landscape of Badrīnāth, while the respective practices were devaluated or even discontinued.

Lokesh Ohri (University of Heidelberg)

Walking Sovereignties: Ritual Travelling and Networks of Power in a West Himalayan Kingdom

Until the 20th century, the vast yet remote regions known as Jaunsar, Bāwar, Bangān, Simla Hills, and parts of Rawain in the Western Himalayas in India, along the headwaters of the Yamuna and Sutlej Rivers were ruled by divine kings, the complex of the four *Mahāsu* brothers being the principal actors in this system usually described as ‘government by deity’. The cult of *Mahāsu* stands out as volatile and intransigent, monopolised by high-caste, headhunting Hindu *Rajputs*, proudly independent of their neighbouring kingdoms and the colonial powers. Local inhabitants continue to insist on their cultural autonomy, living by the ritual regime prescribed by their divine kings. Ritual processions of these divine kings describe a complex landscape of political networks, even post assimilation into a secular nation state. These communal journeys, sometimes across

snowbound high mountain passes, traverse hundreds of kilometres and preserve a religio-political idiom of discourse and practice that reproduces an ancient polity and its complex networks of interaction, ranging from the local to the cosmic. This paper describes how these travels seek points of intersection between the divine and the human, constructing fields of identity, agency and power.

Hans Harder (University of Heidelberg)

Sacred Travelogues: How to Approach the Literary Genre of Pilgrimage Accounts in South Asia

In generic terms, pilgrimage accounts border on travelogues and biographies, and they are closely linked to hagiographies and genres that glorify sacred places (such as *sthalapurāṇa*). How are movement and experience conceptualized in such accounts, and do they prefer any specific narrative viewpoint and perspective? Are there typical hermeneutical premises that structure perception and representation?

Far from giving anything like a survey of South Asian pilgrimage literature, this paper will attempt to approach such questions on the basis of a few chosen samples from South Asian literatures.

Michel Boivin (Centre for South Asian Studies, CNRS-EHESS, Paris)

Integrative Process and Discrimination in a Sufi Pilgrimage: Changing Shapes of the Communitas in Sehwan Sharif, Pakistan

Is Sehwan Sharif a Sindhi pilgrimage? Sehwan Sharif is a town located in central Sindh, in Pakistan, where the Persian born Lal Shahbaz Qalandar went to settle in the last quarter of the 13th Century. Although Persian ghazal are attributed to him, the local Sindhis soon “sindhized” this charismatic figure, and embedded him in local narratives and folksongs in Sindh. After partition, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar was represented as the national Pakistani Sufi by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Another metamorphosis was completed by Shia communities from Punjab who claimed he was Hussein and last but not least, the Hindus also venerated him as Raja Bharthari. How to understand that a single historical figure was given so many interpretations? How so many meanings can be associated to him simultaneously? Can the process of appropriation be a consequence of a rejection in terms of social discrimination? Does it mirror identity dynamics, or political instrumentalization? Through a challenging approach of the theory of *communitas*, this paper wishes to show that a pilgrimage can be both the result of an integrative process at a supra local level, as well as a community identity marker. Some clues will be proposed for the understanding of these very complex processes.

Jürgen Schaffelechner (University of Heidelberg, SFB 619 “Ritual Dynamics”)

The Pilgrimage of Hīṅglāj Devī in Pakistan: Hindu Unity in Insha’Allah Country

The shrine of the Hindu goddess “Hīṅglāj” in Baluchistan has a history that likely dates back to the 5th century BCE. About 250 km to the West of Karachi and located near to the Hingol river, the shrine is situated in a fertile valley where mythology and topography melt together to create an elaborate sacred geography. Only decades ago the pilgrimage through the harsh Baluchistan desert was done on foot, taking about 21 days from the city of Karachi to reach the shrine. This

ordeal was understood as enabling the pilgrims to be freed from even the worst kind of moral transgressions. The immense hardship of that journey is right up until today perpetuated in books, films and in the oral traditions of the devotees.

In the last few decades changes have come upon the solitary goddess in Baluchistan, whose abode is now connected to a newly built Highway along the Makran coast, making the shrine widely accessible. An increasingly active Hindu community in Pakistan is now able to make use of the shrine for developing a sense of “Hindu-Unity” in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Hīṅglāj Devī’s annual festival in April has in the last years attracted over 40 000 Hindus from all over the country, bringing together different casts, classes and ethnicities.

This paper takes a closer look at the importance of the shrine of Hīṅglāj for Hindu unity in Karachi, Sindh and all over Pakistan today and will show how the gatherings at the shrine are used to perpetuate an ideal Hindu lifestyle and behavior.

Michael Oppitz (Emeritus University of Zürich)

Ritual Journeys in Ritual Chants. The Magar Case

Ritual Journeys in the Himalayan regions maybe undertaken physically with real movements through a given landscape. This is the case when people go on a collective or individual pilgrimage to a sacred location in their vicinity or a more distant place. This is also the case when on a fixed calendrical date religious specialists travel to an uninhabited spot – a lake or a high altitude plain – to meet as delegates of their community with other religious specialists of other communities, in order to hold a competitive jamboree there. In journeys of this kind the physical strain of moving through a rugged terrain is an essential part of the enterprise.

On the other hand, trips expressed only in words and chanted to a lay audience in the course of a ceremonial event, may with good reason also be classified as ritual journeys, although the traveller does not move at all from the place where he recites. Such journeys are undertaken by the faith healers of many Himalayan local societies. One such example will be examined in the lecture here announced: by the shamans of the northern Magar, called *ramma*. Such verbal trips with no physical movement may be compared to the kinetic ones: Do they also deal with real places; and when they do, with which; or when they don’t, what kind of places are these?

The ritual journeys recited by faith healers are part of their professional craft. They are assessed by the audience and by themselves for their expected efficacy, their richness and beauty – during and at the end of the performance. For the ethnographer who has recorded them, they open a wide range of opportunities: as expressions of a world view, of religious and geographical ideas, as a mediation between ritual words and acts, as manifestations of an oral art.

Karin M. Polit (Institute of Ethnology, University of Heidelberg)

Play or work? Epistemologies of Performance in Pilgrimages in the Central Himalayas

In this contribution I would like to challenge distinctions between performative art, play and ritual. Taking the ritual performance of a mythical figure – Narad – which is one part of wider ritual activities around a divine pilgrimage in the Central Himalayas in North India as a case study, I will explore how performers and audience understand ritual work, ritual play and ritual as performance as integrative part of their ritualized pilgrimages.

In the Central Himalayas, as elsewhere in India, ritual activities including various pilgrimages