

What does it mean to be nomadic in the past, present and future?

Colloquium - debate
25 au 27 novembre 2021
Museum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris (France)

Call for communications

Nomadism is one of the rare ways of life that can question and link pre-history to current societal and global crises (environmental, health, governmental, economic). **But what does it mean to be nomadic?** How are nomads defined, and defining themselves? How have these populations adapted and still adapting to their natural, cultural and political environments? What future can they envision? These questions are at the center of the theme of the international and interdisciplinary colloquium "**What does it mean to be nomadic in the past, present and future?**" that we are organizing from **November 25 to 27, 2021** at the National Museum of Natural History, in Paris.

The term "nomad" is being updated in the humanities and social sciences and most often refers to an unprecedented diversification of mobilities and migrations in the world. In this sense, this colloquium aims to continue the reflection and interdisciplinary exchange initiated in the framework of the book *Nomad Lives*, the release of which will coincide with the colloquium.

One of the objectives of this conference is to debate these terms and characterizations and – perhaps - to arrive at common or at least convergent insights in order to fully promote transdisciplinarity in Human and Social Sciences research. However, this colloquium also focuses on the future of these societies and of their functioning. If nomadism is a red thread in the long history of humanity, the relationship to nomadism has evolved through various socio-economic and political contexts. The globalized economy of production, subjecting humanity to political, social, sanitary and climatic transformations and imperatives, brings to the fore the question of the future of nomadism. In recent decades, groups have been forced to change their way of in a rapid and brutal fashion, to settle in cities instead of moving around. The abandonment of the nomadic way of life has been radically intensified in the contemporary period. Meanwhile, new forms of (semi-) nomadism are emerging as a result of lasting political destabilization or of ecological and economic changes that force sedentary populations into constant mobility. Thus, in increasingly mobile societies, the nomadic/sedentary divide, already debatable and debated, becomes even more blurred and the use of the term nomad takes on a metaphorical tonality.

The symposium is organized in 4 sessions, each centered on a specific theme: Each session will combine lectures, round table discussions, debates, commented films or short communications.

Session 1: What is 'Being nomadic' at the crossroads of different disciplinary fields of the humanities and social sciences? The discussion will focus on the different meanings of the terms "nomad" and "nomadism" according to various disciplines and fields of study (prehistory, pastoral economics, migrations, gypsy studies, etc.). What criteria define the term "nomad"? What are its limits? What is the specificity of nomadism compared to related modalities of movement (itinerancy, mobility, transhumance...)? From what angle (economic, political, ideological, lifestyle) is nomadism considered? The approaches to nomadism evolved, what debates did they provoke? Can there be a common definition of nomadism in disciplines that approach it from investigative materials as different as those of archaeology and sociology, taking into account, in particular, the fact that these disciplines may or may not integrate into their definition the representations of nomads in societies studied and the ways in which the populations categorized as "nomads" define themselves?

Session 2: What are the links between nomads of yesterday and today. What endogenous (endogamy, rituals, emergence of leaders with specific claims, ...) and exogenous (rejection by local populations, ...) mechanisms contribute to maintaining a nomadic identity? What are the factors contributing to its erosion (forced sedentarization, decline of pastoralism, ...)? This session will also provide an opportunity to initiate a reflection on the nomadism of prehistoric populations with regard to the actualist approach. In this sense, does nomadism seem to you to respond to a certain number of universals? Which ones would be relevant for you? Are nomadism yesterday and nomadism today comparable, notably in their diversity (structures, distances, rhythms...)?

Session 3: What traces have nomadic peoples left or still leave in human history? This session will first address this subject from a genetic point of view with some guiding questions: Are the movements of nomadic populations identifiable? In what way is the notion of nomad relevant to interpret them? What other "proxies"/methods of analysis can be used to characterize the nomadism of past populations? What role did nomadism play in the history of settlement? In the evolutionary history of hominins? Do sedentary lifestyles and nomadic lifestyles leave different traces in the genetic structure of human populations? Here, we may want to complete this approach by also evoking the traces left in the cultural space of nomadic populations: How does nomadism intervene in the structuring of social, technical and economic systems, in that of founding myths and religions, of funerary processes...? Finally, papers could address issues such as the relationship between mobility and the environment; or the actuality of migrants: in the light of human history, can they be considered as nomads; or how do cities re-animate ancient migratory routes?

Session 4: What future for nomads? Defining nomadism, designating nomads, leads explicitly or implicitly to defining or evoking the territory on which this way of life is practiced and the human populations evolve. And this can have major consequences for the future of nomadic populations. In what way are nomadic practices threatened in the contemporary world (state borders = shrinking of nomadic territories, forced sedentarization, development of agriculture or other activities and increase of antagonisms and exactions between nomads and sedentary people, global warming and impoverishment of the rangelands...). Is the nomadic way of life compatible with our westernized and state-run societies? Or, on the contrary, can the adoption of motorized means of travel and modern communication (cell phones) contribute to the maintenance of nomadism? Are new forms of nomadism (such as the de-territorialization of declassed populations, as illustrated by the film *Nomadland*), and new figures of the nomad (travellers, backpackers), becoming more widespread?

The call for communications is launched for sessions 2 to 4.

The communications, of 10 to 15 minutes maximum, in French or in English, will have to fit in one of the listed sessions and necessarily target/answer at least one of the questions raised in the arguments presented for each session. Your communication proposals **are expected by July 30th** with title, keywords (5 words maximum) and abstract (1,500 characters max. spaces included) to be sent jointly to the following addresses: nejma.goutas@cnrs.fr and aline.averbough@mnhn.fr. Please indicate in the subject line of your email: **NOMADES conference**.

This colloquium is organized under the auspices of the Museum national d'Histoire naturelle (MNHN), Department "Man and Environment" and "Direction générale déléguée à la recherche, l'expertise, la valorisation et l'enseignement-formation (DGD-REVE)" in association with the Sociétés en mutation en Méditerranée Institute in Aix-Marseille University SoMUM. It also benefits from the financial support of the UMR 7209 Archéozoologie, Archéobotanique, Sociétés, pratiques et environnements (AASPE) and the CNRS-INEE.

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