

Evgenia Mesaritou and Simon Coleman

On Distinction and Devotion

Shifting Boundaries between Pilgrimage and Tourism

Ever since the anthropological study of pilgrimage developed in earnest from the late 1970s or so, it has been in constant debate with research on tourism. In their classic study of Christian pilgrimage, anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner famously—if ambiguously—claimed that “a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist.”¹ Pilgrimage is also generally assumed to have historically preceded modern tourism.² Luigi Tomasi discusses how pilgrimage evolved in Europe as a response to societal transformations that changed not only human travel but also the ways in which the sacred was approached.³ As travel became a demonstration of “freedom and independence,” pleasure and exploration became crucial parts of the experience,⁴ while the development of tourism was fuelled by the emergence of “free time.”⁵

Certainly, both sub-fields have taken considerable impetus from increased interest in mobilities and the self-conscious making and marking of place.⁶ However, while pilgrimage is often represented as serious, solemn and expressive of pious religious devotion, tourism may be designated as “petty, hedonistic,” “superficial and frivolous.”⁸ Yet, such crude binaries tend to pose more questions than they answer: Should we see visitors’ attitudes as predetermined, unaffected by their experiences at sites? Whose criteria of “seriousness” and pious devotion should be adopted? And exactly what are pilgrims assumed to be devoted *to*, in a manner that apparently excludes tourists?

We argue for a more nuanced understanding of the tourism-pilgrimage relationship by exploring ways in which these categories are both dynamic

and culturally loaded—constantly constructed, negotiated and enacted by various actors and stakeholders involved in sacred sites. We ask when, how, why and by whom pilgrimage-tourism divides are evoked on the ground, and argue that sites often contain what we call “points of distinction”—key indices of identity, embodied in given attitudes and behaviours—that manage the complex work of assigning, adopting and rejecting “pilgrim” and “tourist” roles. Such assignments may be directed toward the ‘self’ as well as ‘others’, and carry a powerful moral valence. They are, in other words, socially constitutive performances that raise questions over who possesses the power to authenticate collective experiences, or to determine the very criteria of authentication.⁹

Our argument draws very broadly on Pierre Bourdieu’s¹⁰ use of the concept of distinction to indicate the deployment of cultural capital as a means to define and negotiate relationships of distance or proximity between groups. The anthropologist Michael Di Giovine¹¹ similarly argues that the divisions between tourism and pilgrimage “do not denote two separate phenomena, but rather are the product of historical and cultural conditions governing a Bourdieuan ‘field of touristic production.’”¹² We do depart from Bourdieu’s more rigid assumptions concerning the inherent divisions between groups as we trace the ways in which different sites emphasize subtly different criteria of distinction in relation to pilgrim and tourist roles, while accepting that the same person may shift between these roles over time. We also show how making points of distinction relies on multi-valent understandings of what might be meant by “devotion” (understood broadly as dedication to and consecration of higher ideals)—within, but also beyond, conventionally religious forms of worship.

Problematizing difference

Strict distinctions between tourism and pilgrimage tend to be based upon sharp Western distinctions between sacred and profane,¹³ as well as the separation of religion from other spheres of activity such as law and politics.¹⁴ However, rigid pilgrimage-tourism dichotomies have increasingly been questioned by scholars working in sociology, anthropology, geography, pilgrimage and tourist studies.¹⁵ Much work has illuminated the ambiguity of modern forms of travel in relation to questions of motivation and timing.¹⁶ One response to such blurring has been the development of a number

of hybrid terms, including “modern tourist pilgrimage,”¹⁷ “pilgrimage tourism,”¹⁸ and “secular pilgrimages.”¹⁹ As Di Giovine and David Picard point out of more recent research, pilgrimage is often “employed as an idiom for secular travel that is similarly hyper-meaningful and transformative for the actor.”²⁰ In this latter sense, travel may be understood as broadly devotional but decidedly non-confessional.

Such analytical language problematizes dichotomous distinctions between pilgrimage and tourism but runs the risk of suggesting a hybridity that is problematic.²¹ In order for an ‘in-between’ to be posited two discrete extremes are constructed, which are thereby potentially essentialized. We prefer to focus on informants’ situational deployment of labels in describing their own and others’ behaviors. We emphasize the need to examine local ways in which such understandings are performed²² and sometimes enforced by administrators, but also visitors to sites. In doing so, we show that points of distinction are powerful yet flexible markers of identity and reference.

Distinction, devotion, and discipline

How might “points of distinction” be created and performed, and associated with varieties of devotion? We explore these questions by juxtaposing three cases, all drawn from Christian examples, in which forms of classification become salient; but while our cases have parallels they also indicate the varied ritual and linguistic media through which distinctions are made, and the different boundaries that might become salient in distinguishing pilgrim from tourist.

Our first example refers to Padre Pio, the Franciscan friar and stigmatic who died in 1968 but has proved a popular if controversial object of devotion at his crypt in San Giovanni Rotondo, southern Italy. Formerly agricultural and impoverished, San Giovanni Rotondo has grown into a pilgrimage- and health-based town owing to the presence of Pio and his hospital.²³ In 2003 the shrine became a point of contention after the Vatican’s decision to appoint a delegate for the sanctuary. According to *La Repubblica*, the Vatican had been concerned about “certain excesses of commercialization of the saint’s image,” a concern that according to the same newspaper was voiced by the Vatican’s delegate, who is quoted as urging people to “reclaim St. Pio, but in authentic dimension.”²⁴ The incompatibility of some activities for pilgrimage can also be seen in the conceptual separation between “la zona religiosa” (the religious zone) and “il paese” (the village),²⁵ which is at times retained

by the town's inhabitants.²⁶

The inauguration of a new church dedicated to Padre Pio at the site in 2004 also raised problematic issues as to whether the site was now too business-oriented. At the same time, the friars attempted to transform "tourists" into "pilgrims" by directing shrine visitors' movement and readings of the site through the spatial and temporal organization of the shrine. Di Giovine describes incidents where tourism was referenced by spiritual directors or guides or even travellers themselves²⁷ precisely to reprimand those who were engaging in "practices that were perceived as antithetical to spirituality, such as concern for the quality of their food or lodging," with the words "this is pilgrimage, not tourism."²⁸ In such remarks, concern over bodily comforts becomes a publicly articulated "point of distinction" whereby a person can indicate not only a willingness to engage in a degree of bodily privation (with hints of self-sacrifice, perhaps echoing Pio himself) but also to display focused attention on what is asserted to be the ultimate aim of the journey. Given these circumstances, the comment has a moralizing dimension, attempting to bring things back into the order that "ought" to be characterizing them. In the sociologist Erving Goffman's terms, this is the group's attempt to discipline members who threaten "to discredit the definition of the situation fostered by other members."²⁹ The action is significant not only for what it states about the social and cultural frame of the group, but also because it indicates the very fragility of the pilgrim-tourism distinction. To state "this is pilgrimage, not tourism" draws an ideological and behavioral line in the sand, but the need for such articulation demonstrates that it is indeed written in sand—a medium not celebrated for its stability.

The importance of the context on the ways in which the distinction is articulated is made visible in another example from the Padre Pio pilgrimage group. Di Giovine, who also served as a guide, reports how he once tried using the phrase "this is pilgrimage, not tourism" when the group he was accompanying to Rome complained "about the quality of the tea and biscuits at a roadside Autogrill."³⁰ The reply he received from one traveler was that the latter knew that this was pilgrimage but that he/she did not expect the pilgrimage to start so soon. Di Giovine notes how this comment illustrates the perspectival nature of people's understandings of their touristic experiences.³¹ At this point in the journey the traveler had deemed it appropriate to care for mundane pleasures such as good tea; in short, to act like a tourist.

While the shrine of Padre Pio is a highly popular Catholic site, the

Camino or Way of St. James refers to the pilgrimage routes across Europe leading to the Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela, in northern Spain. The site formed an important part of the European pilgrimage landscape in the Middle Ages, but was relatively forgotten in the period between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.³²

Despite the positive impact of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) on the numbers of pilgrims traveling the Camino, the Reformation, as well as the Castile-France conflict, had led the pilgrimage into a crisis which translated into major losses in its international pilgrim constituency. In line with Trent, the spirit of which ran counter to the Reformation, and underlain by the support provided to the Pope's infallibility by Santiago's Cardinal, the discovery of St. James's remains was sanctioned by the Vatican, therefore leading to the renewal of the pilgrimage in the latter half of the nineteenth century.³³ What was at stake at this stage was the survival of the Catholic Church itself against both the Protestants and the "liberal temptations of many Spanish governments."³⁴

Franco's support of the pilgrimage was another major contributing factor to the pilgrimage's success, which continued after Spain's transition to democracy, opening and diversifying its referents.³⁵ While for Franco, Santiago, in its Matamoros (literally, "Moor-killing") version, served as a tool for political propaganda³⁶ enlisted for the purpose of making Spain great again³⁷ and of promoting National Catholicism, "from the late fifties and early sixties through the end of Franco's regime"³⁸ the pilgrimage route gained primacy over its destination and the pilgrimage's political importance was superseded by tourism.³⁹ In response, as the Camino was absorbed "into the national tourism promotional apparatus"⁴⁰ What came to be at stake for the Church was in fact the character of the pilgrimage as pilgrimage instead of tourism. In light of this trend the Church tried "to affirm that many of the visitors were 'true' pilgrims, not just tourists."⁴¹

A fresh revival was prompted by European Council and Council of Europe cultural programs, and the Camino became the first European Cultural Itinerary in 1988. As Pack notes, by the end of the twentieth century St. James was claimed by a variety of different constituencies in and outside Spain.⁴² Nowadays, up to a quarter of a million people make the trip annually along the Camino to the Cathedral, almost half of them non-Spanish, and the vast majority arrive on foot.

What this brief history of the Camino points to is the shifting fortunes and constituencies of the Camino; the ways in which what has been "at stake"

in staging and going on the pilgrimage has shifted considerably over time, causing simultaneous shifts to the forms of religious, cultural and political capital produced and drawn upon within its framework.

The Camino provides an important context for understanding the complexities of the ethical practices surrounding contemporary pilgrimage practices, given that the popularity of the journey does not necessarily indicate conventional attachments to Catholic (or more generally Christian) piety, just as—in contrast to the Pio example—it is often the route that encourages “devotion” and dedication rather than arrival at the Cathedral itself. In her study of the Camino, where authenticity is to large extent defined as a dissociation from technology,⁴³ Frey shows how it is not the motive of the journey that is seen as the defining characteristic of pilgrims (whether this is religious or not) but the chosen mode of travel. As Frey notes, to be considered a pilgrim one has to walk or cycle to Santiago; a religious motive prompting the journey is not enough.⁴⁴ Walkers and cyclists will often regard those who travel by bus as tourists and thus as inauthentic:⁴⁵ “Tourists, understood to be frivolous, superficial people, travel *en masse* by bus, car, or plane. Pilgrims, understood to be genuine, authentic, serious people, walk and cycle.”⁴⁶ Pilgrims’ enactment of this distinction can also be seen in adoption of the symbols of the Camino: the sea scallop, the walking staff, and the back-pack.⁴⁷ Readily recognizable by others,⁴⁸ these insignia become part of the pilgrims’ personal front or expressive equipment.⁴⁹ They serve to define the situation for those with whom the pilgrims interact but also for their bearers since they create sets of expectations, obligations and responsibilities in relation to the journey.

If the Camino rather than the Cathedral is the chief stage for enacting difference, we see how walking (the public display of both spending time and bodily effort, in a context where both are rare commodities in religious and secular regimes of value) can become a key activity. The criticism of others as tourists by some travelers refers, for Frey, to their selected mode of travel and not to their motivation.⁵⁰ Frey’s observation, if perhaps a little overplayed, may nonetheless have validity because religiously sanctioned devotion is not the sole inspiration of those who see themselves as pilgrims: the “appreciation of nature and physical effort, a rejection of materialism, an interest in or a nostalgia for the past (especially the medieval), a search for inner meaning, an attraction to meaningful human relationships, and solitude” are equally likely motivations.⁵¹

Thus as we move our ethnographic focus from southern Italy to northern

Spain, we see how the focus of dedication and performative consecration shifts away from the body of a dead saint toward the living bodies of travellers themselves, tramping along a winding route that represents both time past (history) and time expended (walking rather than driving). While the religious authenticity of Pio's sanctity has long been disputed by a Catholic Church sceptical of the validity and origins of his claimed stigmata, along the Camino the authenticity toward which travellers aspire is more diffusely expressed and yet still evocative of sacrifice, even if the latter is not expressed in liturgical language. What is striking along the Camino is how important—and also contestable—the mode of travel as index of authenticity actually is. At the same time, the mocking characterization of some travellers as “tourists” is not necessarily endorsed by those labelled as such. Frey notes how weekend pilgrims see their journey as a pilgrimage in spite of its limited length and duration.⁵² The different understandings of what constitutes pilgrimage is made vividly evident in an example Frey cites where the priest saying daily mass at Roncesvalles was surprised to see that, when he called the pilgrims forward to the altar, a group of Spanish weekend bus travellers joined the long-distance pilgrims who had journeyed to the village by bicycle or on foot. Illustrating the variety and complex ways in which modern pilgrims are interpreted, the priest blessed both groups even though he saw the weekend bus travellers' reaction to his call as “a misunderstanding of the pilgrimage” on their part.⁵³

Differences between pilgrimage and tourism are evoked not only by travellers but also by spiritual leaders who may express the desire for fewer tourists and more pilgrims, and to transform the former into the latter. Nevertheless, what will become the point of distinction for any given group also depends on context. As far as indulgences are concerned, for example, the manner in which one arrives at Santiago does not matter in doctrinal terms;⁵⁴ yet on another level the mode of travel does seem to matter for the Church, which reserves its credential identifying the visitor as a pilgrim only for those who walk, cycle or horse ride to Santiago.⁵⁵ On a practical level, the credential provides access to the Camino's infrastructure as well as to the certificate that is awarded by the Church on completing a pilgrimage of religious motivation.⁵⁶

An historical examination of the Camino illustrates how concerns over distinguishing the “real” from the “fraudulent” pilgrims are almost as old as the Camino itself. Maryjane Dunn⁵⁷, for example shows how the attire and

documentation of a pilgrim had developed as material signs determining whether a pilgrim was authentic or not already from the eighth century.⁵⁸ Distinguishing among travellers was not only a religious matter but also a question with practical implications as pilgrims could yield material benefits stemming out of their pilgrim status. The benefits accorded to pilgrims made the practice and those involved in it susceptible to deception,⁵⁹ therefore raising civic, political⁶⁰ and social concerns⁶¹ which were manifested in decrees such as those issued by King Philip II of Spain and Louis XIV and XV of France. As Dunn further notes, sacred as well as secular institutions with “financial and/or spiritual stakes in the issue” were concerned to distinguish the true from the false pilgrims.⁶² And so did the people travelling the Camino themselves. A “mutually beneficial relation” therefore developed between the Church and the State, the first ensuring that alms were received by pilgrims alone and the second working to maintain that law and order.⁶³

Concerns over classification re-emerged in the 1980s and 1990s when the pilgrimage routes were revitalized⁶⁴ and were raised anew in the 2000s owing to decisions made by the Pilgrim’s Office of the Santiago de Compostela with regard to the use of the pilgrims’ passport and the issuing of the *Certificado del Peregrino*.⁶⁵ Once again, we see how such developments highlight questions over who has the right of classification,⁶⁶ but also how and why certain features become “points of distinction” while others do not.

The Camino and Padre Pio examples show how any given point of distinction is relational to the internal logic of the particular pilgrimage. It may vary not only across sites but also at the same site across constituencies or within constituencies that make the pilgrimage-tourism distinction. Apart from illustrating the negotiated ways in which the categories of pilgrim and tourism are made sense of on the ground, the two examples show how the pilgrimage-tourism divide may be evoked by travellers themselves in order to label others and thus indirectly define the self.⁶⁷

Our final example shows a more direct set of interactions between visitors and shrine staff, illustrating a degree of hierarchy in enforcing such definitions that may reflect particular forms of deference appropriate to Orthodoxy.⁶⁸ In her study of pilgrims from a Southern Californian Russian Orthodox parish to a Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona, Julia Klimova notes how parishioners aim to follow the schedule of the monastery and attend all its services so that their journey will not be considered a weekend road trip but a pilgrimage.⁶⁹ This observation indicates that here too the duration of the journey and the mode in which it is undertaken are important in determining

the character of the trip: internal motivation is being signaled through external signs of devotion. Since the trip is short and made in the comfort of the bus or car, people feel the need to compensate by undertaking certain actions thought to be restorative of the character of the journey as pilgrimage.

At the same time, such categories of achieved pilgrim status interact with more permanent and ascribed roles. Although non-Orthodox Christians are welcomed to the monastery, they are treated as visitors and not pilgrims. Elders will not give outsiders their blessing for the communion even though they can offer confession and advise people.⁷⁰ The sacraments are reserved only for Orthodox Christians, while other Christians are also located separately for Church services and meals.⁷¹ Since participation in both the sacraments and the everyday life of the monastery are perceived as integral to the spiritual work which is seen as constituting the pilgrimage practice, in the eyes of Klimova's Russian Orthodox informants these rules made the non-Orthodox appear as merely visitors instead of pilgrims.⁷² Thus, while the boundary enacted by the elders is a division of Orthodox from non-Orthodox, it is perceived by visitors as a point of distinction between pilgrims and tourists, even though it appears that "tourists" may still be serious and motivated travelers.

Concluding remarks: Performing points of distinction

Our focus has been on the intellectual, cultural and religious stakes involved in declaring someone to be a tourist rather than a pilgrim. What emerges from the three examples we have cited is the importance of the "definition of the situation"⁷³ in relation to pilgrimage and tourism. This definition is constructed and maintained through the performative and linguistic enactment of distinctions drawn on by various constituencies on the basis of often differing criteria (denominational affiliation, mode of travel, attitude toward accommodation, etc.). In all three cases, while the "points of distinction" vary, devotion to what is seen as the essence of the journey (whether overtly religious or not) drives the distinctions that discipline both the self and others who may threaten the definition of the situation as pilgrimage.

The enactment of the pilgrim-tourist distinction effectively constructs pilgrimage as a discrete and extraordinary activity. As an act of academic distinction, the divide between the two has been asserted but then blurred, as thesis and antithesis have moved toward relative synthesis, and as sharp

boundaries between sacred and profane have been challenged. On the ground, distinctions between the two roles remain salient if unstable within and across sites. We have therefore argued for close attention to be paid to the specific circumstances under which an individual or group are labeled—or label themselves—pilgrims or tourists.

Clearly, distinctions have always been made at pilgrimage sites among different visitors, the claims of undifferentiated *communitas* notwithstanding.⁷⁴ However, what we are picking up are some of the particular circumstances that surround pilgrimages orchestrated by shrines that are simultaneously open to unpredictable publics and yet also engaged in the hard definitional work of distinguishing the more from the less devoted. While clerical assumptions in carrying out such work may overlap closely with the attitudes of visitors in certain cases—as for instance in the Orthodox example described by Klimova⁷⁵—under ideologically plural circumstances such as that of the Camino more ambiguities may be evident over defining the behavioral frames that distinguish pilgrims from tourists.

Our approach has been explicitly “performative.” The argument has adopted a Goffmanian perspective whereby it becomes necessary to examine the specific social, linguistic and behavioral circumstances under which roles are staged and sustained.⁷⁶ But we are also making the point that to define the self or other as pilgrim or tourist is not simply to express identities that already exist in permanent or unambiguous form: it is also to contribute to the contested process of *making* pilgrims, of engaging in the complex interplay between labeling and enactment that reinforces the devotion of travelers to journeys they have chosen—however ambiguously—to undertake.

Notes

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