

## **PILGRIMAGES TODAY**



## **PILGRIMAGES TODAY**

Based on papers read at the symposium  
on pilgrimages today  
held at Åbo, Finland, on 19–21 August 2009

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## Editorial Note

The symposium *Pilgrimages Today*, which the Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History arranged 19–21 August 2010 in Åbo, Finland, attracted a lot of interest. We might note that earlier, a decade ago, Nordic scholars of comparative religion still comprised the target group for the Donner Symposia, which were begun in 1962. Today, however, researchers of comparative religion from all parts of the world are our target group. The turning point was the symposium in 1997, *Methodology of the Study of Religion*, which was ‘an IAHR Regional Symposium’. That was the first time English was the language of the conference, and it has been so at all symposia since then. Nowadays, information on a forthcoming symposium (a word we use as fully synonymous with conference) is no longer spread using traditional postal services, but through mailing lists that disseminate the message with the speed of the wind in a multitude of directions. It is always a pleasure to see the registrations for a symposium today—most continents are represented.

Our definition of pilgrimage in our Call for Papers was in no sense controversial: ‘Basically, a pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by individuals or a group to a place, which for the single individual or the individuals in the group is of great importance because of something they have learnt and experienced in the culture and religion which they have grown up within. . . We explicitly welcome papers on pilgrimages that are akin to, but not identical with, religious pilgrimages. As examples of such, we could mention pilgrimages to Elvis Presley’s Graceland or to the grave of Jim Morrison. Here, it should be noted that one of our points of departure is also that, despite their similarities, it is important to take into account the difference between pilgrimages and tourism.’

An answer to the question of whether a trip to Graceland or to the grave of Morrison or other similar tourism perhaps in a post-modern world are, after all, pilgrimages of today—in a world where many put together their own religious salvation message about their own imagined gods—is hopefully provided by the present volume.



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## The Biswa Ijtema

### Introduction

The Tablighi Jama'at has not, until recently, been the focus of much research, despite its almost 80-year history. Moreover, the Tablighi authorities themselves discourage writing about the movement, since Islam is seen as a practical activity first and foremost, not something that can simply be written or read about (Sikand 1999: 102). For this article I have sought out material about the Tablighi Jama'at in Bangladesh and the *Biswa Ijtema* in particular. Literature, however, has been hard to come by. The book *Travellers in Faith* by Muhammad Khalid Masud (2000) deals primarily with the ideological background of the Tablighi Jama'at, its growth in India and the transnational aspect of the movement. Unfortunately it does not contain information about the movement's development in the rest of South Asia. Yoginder Sikand, however, has written an article of great relevance for mine: 'The Tablighi Jama'at in Bangladesh' (1999), which briefly also discusses the Biswa Ijtema. In addition to this and other academic writings on the Tablighi Jama'at and Bangladesh I have relied mainly on articles in local newspapers to try to get a clearer perception of the Biswa Ijtema.

Tablighi Jama'at was founded by Mawlana Ilyas in Mewat as a reaction against the decline of Muslim political power in India and the increasing British influence on the subcontinent. While different authors place the foundation of the movement in the late 1920s, probably based on reports of Mawlana Ilyas beginning his *tabligh*<sup>1</sup> work after his return from *Hajj* in 1926, the authors of the book *Travellers in Faith* consider the true launching date for the movement to be much later. According to them the official date was in 1934, after a meeting held in Mewat. (Masud 2000: 9.)

The Biswa Ijtema is the annual congregation of the Tablighi Jama'at, held in the district of Tongi, just outside Dhaka in Bangladesh. The term Biswa Ijtema

1 *Tabligh* is often equated with *da'wa*, meaning to communicate the call (Masud 2000: xxi).

(or *Viswa/Bishwa Ijtema*) translates as ‘world congregation’. *Biswa* is Sanskrit for ‘world’. *Ijtema* is Arabic and means ‘public gathering’. (Jaffor Ullah.)

## Tablighi Jama‘at in Bangladesh

The establishment of British rule in Bengal in the late eighteenth century brought with it the emergence of a number of Islamic reform movements. The Tablighi Jama‘at shares the aims of these movements to cleanse ‘popular’ Bengali Islam from its syncretistic heritage, and instead uphold a strict adherence to the *shari‘a*. According to Yoginder Sikand’s article, ‘The Tablighi Jama‘at in Bangladesh’, the available literature sheds very little light on how the Tablighi Jama‘at was first launched in Bengal. Most Bengali Tablighi texts available are translations of texts originally written in Urdu and are of little historical value. The only source that mentions the early developments of the Tablighi Jama‘at in Bengal, a biography of a renowned Tablighi leader, reveals that while Tablighis had reached Bengal prior to the partition of India in 1947, it was only after the independence of Pakistan that Tablighi work actually spread over the region. Several disciples of the founder, Mawlana Ilyas, apparently moved to both wings of Pakistan, where they began to do Tablighi work among the local Muslim population and Muslim refugees from India. A *markaz* (headquarter) for the coordination of the Tablighi work was initially set up in Raiwind, a township just outside Lahore in Pakistan. (Sikand 1999: 102–4.)

Prior to 1947 Tablighi activity seems to have been concentrated largely in Calcutta. Initially most of the leading Tablighi activists in East Pakistan were refugees from West Bengal, Calcutta in particular. The most senior among them was Haji Mohsin Ahmad, also called Dada Bhai, who would come to play a leading role in the spread of the Tablighi Jama‘at in East Pakistan. Mohsin Ahmad spent a lot of time and effort doing *tabligh* work among Muslim government employees and the Muslim students of Dhaka University. Thanks to his efforts Dhaka’s Engineering College gradually emerged as a major centre of Tablighi activity in East Pakistan. Members of the newly-emerging Bengali Muslim middle-class struggled to make a place for themselves in the face of what they perceived as Hindu upper-caste opposition and bonded together in the *jama‘ats* and *Ijtemas* provided by the Tablighi Jama‘at. Striving for upward mobility and faced with resistance, the Muslim middle-class found a natural expression in religious terms—greater participation in Islamic activity and stress on the Islamic identity. (Sikand 1999: 105–6.)

Another important focus of attention for the pioneers of Tablighi work in East Pakistan was students and teachers at the local *madrasas*. The *ulama* had great influence as local spokesmen and religious authorities, and it was seen as an important part of the Tablighi agenda at this early stage to bring them into the movement. Having roots in the Deobandi tradition seems to have helped the Tablighi Jama'at establish a strong base in a number of Deobandi *madrasas* in East Pakistan at the time. The affiliation of leading *ulama* with the Tablighi Jama'at must have had a substantial impact on their followers as well, considering how religious experts were often not only respected, but held in awe in Bengali society. (Sikand 1999: 107–8.)

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1972, the Tablighi Jama'at witnessed an even more remarkable expansion in the region. A major cause for this seems to have been the changing role of Islam in public affairs after the 1971–2 Bangladeshi Liberation War. In the years following 1975 there were also a number of attempts by ruling elites to use Islam as a political means to help legitimize unstable regimes. (Sikand 1999: 112.)

Different Islamic political groups, such as the Jamaat-i-Islami,<sup>2</sup> were actively involved in the large-scale massacre of freedom fighters during the Liberation War. This had a strong impact on many Bengalis who, when independence was won, felt a strong resistance towards Islamic political groups and Jamaat-i-Islami in particular. When Bangladesh was declared a secular state, religious political parties, including Jamaat-i-Islami, were banned. These things combined proved to be working in Tablighi Jama'at's favour. By staying aloof from the conflict they earned the trust and respect of the Bangladeshi people who, when the war was over, turned to the Tablighi Jama'at in growing numbers. Several Jamaat-i-Islami activists were also reported to be participating in Tablighi activities, perhaps in fear of arrest or persecution. This, however, does not mean that they necessarily changed their allegiance. In the long run the Tablighi Jama'at's disassociation from politics allowed it to continue its activities while other groups were banned. As a result it witnessed a rapid growth in the years following the Liberation War. (Sikand 1999: 113–14.)

Today the Tablighi Jama'at is active all over Bangladesh, with a *markaz* in every district and most sub-districts. The movement is weaker in the north and the south eastern parts of Bangladesh, which are naturally cut off from the rest of the country by large rivers. The north also has a tradition of strong peasant movements, which may present a challenge to the Islamic movements.

2 The descendant of an Islamic movement founded by Abul Ala Mawdudi in 1941 (Sfeir 2007: 271).

The largest centre for Tablighi activity in Bangladesh is Mymensingh, followed by Dhaka, Noakhali, Comilla, Sylhet and Chittagong. Yoginder Sikand claims that Chittagong has been a challenge for the Tablighi Jama'at due to its strong Sufi presence. The movement openly opposes popular Sufism. (Sikand 1999: 117–18.)

According to Yoginder Sikand the Tablighi Jama'at has been particularly strong among peasants and rural entrepreneurs. The central role of the oral tradition within the Tablighi Jama'at is obviously a big reason why it appeals to lower middle class Bangladeshis who have poorly developed literacy skills, if any at all. The claims for higher social status also often take religious expression; indigenous names are changed to more 'Islamic' ones and both women and men take on the 'Islamic' dress. When one makes enough money one goes on *Hajj* and, upon returning, is held in respect as a *haji* or *haja*. Also, when one makes a little more money one can afford to take time for Tablighi activities. (Sikand 1999: 118.)

Mumtaz Ahmad notes that the Tablighi Jama'at is increasingly popular also among the educated classes in urban areas. He claims that the Tablighi Jama'at is the only Islamic movement that has managed to cut across socio-economic class barriers. (Ahmad 2008: 63.) The more highly educated people who are actively involved in Tablighi work also tend to hold high positions in the hierarchy (Sikand 1999: 119).

Yoginder Sikand accounts the pan-Islamic appeal as one of the main reasons for the successful spread of Tablighi Jama'at in Bengal, and India as a whole (1999: 105). Mumtaz Ahmad adds the dedicated *da'wa* work performed by the Tablighi members, the non-sectarian Islamic message and the person-to-person approach of the Tablighis to the list of reasons to why the movement has gained so much success (Ahmad 2008: 62).

Today Tablighi Jama'at works largely as a silent element within Bangladeshi society, in particular among those who do not want to take the risk of being associated with any Islamic political party. Many prominent Islamic leaders of Bangladesh have been attracted to Islam through the Tablighi Jama'at, for instance the former *amir* (leader) of Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh; Professor Golam Azam (Islam-bd.org). The chiefs of all three wings of the Bangladeshi armed forces: the Army, the Air Force and the Navy, usually also take part in the Biswa Ijtema (Sikand 1999: 120–1).

## Early Ijtemas

In the years after the independence of India in 1947 the Tablighi Jama'at grew at a steady pace in various parts of East Bengal. This called for setting up centres from where the Tablighi activity could be organized. During the years immediately following independence activists would meet at an Ijtema held on the first Sunday every month at Dhaka's Lalbagh Shahi mosque. As the numbers of participants increased the centre was shifted, first to the Khan Muhammad Mosque and then to the Kakrail Mosque in suburban Dhaka. The Kakrail Mosque had an open space around it that could accommodate the large number of participants at the Ijtemas. A new, three-storey mosque was then built nearby the old building. The first Biswa Ijtema is reported to have taken place at the Kakrail Mosque of Dhaka in 1948, with only a few followers of Hazrat Mawlana Yusuf present. (Sikand 1999: 104; Banglapedia.) According to the opposition leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman it was her father, Bongabadhu who took the initiative to permanently allot the area for the new Kakrail Mosque (Bdnews24.com, 26.1.2006/1).

In 1953 a large all-Pakistan Ijtema was held at Sukkur in Sind, Pakistan. Here it was decided to spread the Tablighi work all over Pakistan, East Pakistan included. To achieve this, three Tablighi headquarters were set up in East Pakistan: in Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna, along with seven in West Pakistan: in Karachi, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Multan, Hyderabad, Peshawar, and Quetta (Sikand 1999: 104). Three main Ijtema centres developed in different parts of the subcontinent: Raiwind in Pakistan, Bhopal in India and Tongi in Bangladesh. In terms of attendance the Ijtema at Tongi is the largest.

Annual Ijtemas began being held at the Kakrail Mosque in 1954, with an estimated 15,000–20,000 people attending the first year (Sikand 1999: 111). In the same year a large Tablighi gathering is reported to have been held at the camp of the *Hajj* pilgrims in Chittagong.

To spur the Tablighi work in East Pakistan Mawlana Yusuf (d. 1965), son and successor of the founder Mawlana Ilyas, paid several visits to the region to attend the large Ijtemas held there. There seem to be some differences of opinion as to when and where these Ijtemas were held. Yoginder Sikand reports that the first Ijtema was held in Dhaka in 1954 and was presided over by Mawlana Yusuf. On the following visits made by Yusuf to East Pakistan, in 1956, 1959, 1960 and 1962, Ijtemas were held and *jama'ats* (groups) were formed and dispatched to spread the Tablighi message. At these early Ijtemas *jama'ats* were reportedly formed that went all the way to Mecca for *Hajj*, doing Tablighi *da'wa* work along the way. (Sikand 1999: 104.) Another source

informs us that in 1958 an Ijtema was held in the city of Narayanganj, near Dhaka, and in 1960, 1962 and 1965 at the Ramna Race Course in Dhaka.

Again, the source material differs on where the Ijtema was held in 1965—either at Ramna Race Course, or at Kakrail Mosque. Nevertheless, it became clear that the venue for the annual Ijtema had become too small for the vast crowds. This resulted in a decision being made by the Tablighi authorities to shift the venue of the Ijtema to Tongi, a township just outside Dhaka. The *markaz* remained at the Kakrail Mosque where leading elders of the movement resided, coordinating the work of *jama'ats* all over East Bengal. By the late 1960s the Tablighi Jama'at had established a firm foothold in the province. (Sikand 1999; 111; Banglapedia.)

According to A. H. Jaffor Ullah the Tablighi Jama'at Ijtemas used to last five days at some point, but to boost attendance the programme was shortened to three days. Apparently, in the past business used to suffer during the week the Ijtema was held and even government used to shut down due to attendance problems. (Jaffor Ullah.) According to a source from 2010, the centre of Dhaka was deserted on the last day of the Ijtema. Sunday is a working day in Bangladesh, but many left their jobs in order to attend the event that poorer Bangladeshis equate with the *Hajj*, which they cannot afford to attend (Muxlim.com).

### The Biswa Ijtema today

The Biswa Ijtema is held every year a few days before Ramadan in the Tongi district just outside Dhaka, on the bank of the river Turag, known as Kahar Daria. The annual Ijtema is said to be the largest congregation of Muslims after *Hajj* in Mecca. The estimated numbers of devotees participating in the Ijtema varies, according to my sources from 1.7 to 4 million. (Sikand 1999: 121; Ahmad 2008: 62; Bdnews24.com, 29.1.2006/2.) What is remarkable about the Biswa Ijtema as a pilgrimage is that the location where it is held, the township of Tongi, bears no connection to a holy person, nor is it a holy place in itself and as such it is not a typical pilgrimage site.

It is customary that the Bangladeshi President, Prof. Dr Iajuddin Ahmed and the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia make congratulatory statements at the beginning of the event, expressing their hope that the Biswa Ijtema will help to strengthen the unity, harmony and brotherhood of the Islamic *umma* and in the establishment of peace and stability across the world. Other leading politicians from the ruling and the opposition parties also make a

point of attending, especially at the closing prayers, the *akheri munajat*. They then seek blessings from the Tablighi leaders, including someone from the global headquarters at Hazrat Nizamuddin in New Delhi. (Sikand 1999: 121–2; Bdnews24.com, 26.1.2006/2; Bdnews24.com, 26.1.2006/3.) As Yoginder Sikand notes in his article, attending such an event publicly is in itself a strong political statement (Sikand 1999: 122). According one source, diplomats from several Muslim countries have also attended (Bdnews24.com, 29.1.2006/2). The officially non-political stance of the Tablighi Jama'at has helped it recruit members from the Bangladeshi military and among civil servants. It has also been able to avoid the conflicts between rival political camps in Bangladesh (Ahmad 2008: 63).

In recent years devotees from up to 90 different countries have attended the annual Biswa Ijtema. The range of nationalities seems to broaden every year. Participants come from India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Afghanistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Bhutan, Syria, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Jordan, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Turkey, Spain, Great Britain, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, USA, Canada and Australia. In 2010 the number of foreign participants was estimated at 25,000. (The New Nation, 25.1.2010.)

According to an article in the *International Herald Tribune*, women are not usually allowed to attend (Internet Herald Tribune, 3.2.2007). However, the *Bangladesh Today* and *Daily Star* newspapers report that around 100,000 of the attendants at the last two Ijtemas have been women (Bangladesh Today, 31.1.2009; The Daily Star, 22.1.2010). The information about women attending is supported by pictures on the internet of women gathering in groups in the near vicinity of the Ijtema grounds. Anwar Hussein writes that women have a hard time getting a place in the main Ijtema field (Demotix, 24.1.2010).

In his article 'Women and the Tablighi Jama'at' (2009) Yoginder Sikand discusses the strict *pardah* (seclusion) that Tablighi women live under. Only married women are allowed to travel in a *jama'at*, and they must be accompanied by their husbands or a *mahram* (unmarriageable kin). Their primary responsibility is to educate themselves about Islam and spread the message of the Tablighi Jama'at to their relatives and friends. Taking this into consideration it does not seem unlikely that arrangements are made for women to attend the Ijtema from nearby areas, in order for them not to intermingle with non-*mahram* men.

Getting to the site of the Ijtema can be a challenge; cars queue for miles and many walk instead. The streets leading to the venue are overcrowded with

people. Trains and buses are arranged to ensure transport for the devotees, often taking as many passengers as they can possibly hold on to the vehicle. (BBC 25.1.2008; Bangladesh Today, 31.1.2009.)

## Arrangements at the site

The Bangladeshi government makes special arrangements to provide the basic services for the participants at the Biswa Ijtema (Sikand 1999: 121–2). In 2009 the State Minister for Home Affairs said that the government would set up more permanent structures and develop the Ijtema ground in the future (The News Today, 31.1.2009).

In order for the functions at the Biswa Ijtema to run smoothly the Ijtema ground is divided into several sections (*khittas*), each assigned for a region of the country and a foreign geographic zone. Each section has its own entrance and is supervised by a trustee (*jimmadar*), who is assisted by district and *thana* (police station) trustees. Maps of the site are kept at the entrances and devotees are provided with information about their district-based sections and their place of stay. Metal detectors are a recent addition at the entrances, but organizers admit it is impossible to check everyone. All affairs of the Ijtema are coordinated by the central Ijtema management. No paid labour is employed for the Ijtema functions; all work is done by teams of volunteers. A number of mobile courts operate to oversee arrangements and transactions during the event; they also inspect the standards at the many food stalls at the venue. (Bdnews24.com, 2.2.2007; Bdnews24.com, 23.1.2006, Banglapedia; Bangladesh.com.)

A large jute canopy is erected over the 1 km long prayer ground. Special arrangements are made for foreign devotees in the North West corner of the Ijtema ground. In 2009 the prayer ground was further expanded to the West by dumping earth in the riverbed. This now poses a threat to the natural flow of the already mistreated river Turag. Several floating bridges are set up across the river for the duration of the Ijtema. (Bangladesh Today, 29.1.2009.)

The Department of Public Health and Engineering, in collaboration with UNICEF, has arranged portable tanks to facilitate access to drinking water for participants on the road. Several deep-tube wells have also been set up. (Bdnews24.com, 2.2.2007.)

Many private social and religious organizations set up facilities to provide free medical treatment around the clock for the devotees. A large number of medical teams as well as numerous sanitation teams work the Ijtema



grounds, and the Tongi hospital is equipped with additional facilities. Several fire brigade teams are also on standby in case of emergency. (Bdnews24.com, 2.2.2007; Bangladesh Today, 31.1.2009.) Generators and transformers are reserved to ensure uninterrupted supply of electricity at the venue (News Today, 31.1.2009).

In 2010 the government's promise of better facilities was kept, at least in part, when a three-storey building with sanitation and bath facilities for the devotees was set up (Daily Star, 15.1.2010).

Security arrangements at the site include observation towers for the more than 20,000 members of the Rapid Action Battalion who oversee the whole event (Bangladesh Today, 29.1.2009; Bdnews24.com, 29.1.2006/2). Surveillance cameras are also set up at the entrances and at especially important points across the Ijtema ground (Bdnews24.com 28.1.2006).

In 2005 most districts in Bangladesh were struck by simultaneous bomb blasts arranged by clandestine Islamic groups belonging to the Ahl-e-Hadith (Ahmad 2008: 49–50). Hence in 2006 the organizers expected a lower presence of foreign and local devotees than previous years. Law enforcers seized large amounts of arms and explosives prior to the event. The intelligence service security measures were tightened at Tongi, and new residents renting houses were kept under strict surveillance. There are at least 20 slum areas considered to be crime dens in the near vicinity of the Ijtema venue. (New Age, 14.1.2006.)

## The programme

The Ijtema rejects politics and focuses on reviving the tenets of Islam and promoting peace and harmony. The devotees discuss the Qur'an, pray and listen to *bayans* (sermons) by Islamic scholars from around the world on fundamental issues of *tabligh* (Internet Herald Tribune 3.2.2007).

The opening sermon of the Ijtema is delivered after *fajr* prayers at dawn on Friday (News Today, 31.1.2009). Sermons are delivered by Tablighi Islamic scholars, usually including someone from the headquarters in Delhi. The son of the former *amir* of the Tablighi Jama'at, Maulana Jobayer Hasan,<sup>3</sup> has led sermons in recent years, along with others such as Ahmed Lart, Maulana Ismail Hossain and Mohamed Sad, also from Delhi, Maulana Mosharraf from Bangladesh, and Shamim Ahmed and Maulana Abdul Wahab from Pakistan

3 Also referred to as Mawlana Zubayrul Hassan.

(Bdnews24.com 29.1.2006/1; Bdnews24.com, 29.1.2006/2; News Today, 31.1.2009; News Today, 1.2.2009). The lectures and sermons held by various Islamic scholars are being simultaneously translated into several different languages, including Bangla, Arabic, Urdu, Tamil and Malay. The three-day programme also includes solemnizing marriages without dowry with the permissions of brides and bridegrooms with their guardians (New Nation, 25.1.2010). Despite the enormous crowds of people attending the Ijtema only few deaths occur every year. In most cases they are related to old age or traffic accidents. The funeral prayers for the devotees who die during the event take place on the Ijtema grounds. (Bangladesh Today, 2.2.2009.)

To enable the vast crowds attending the Ijtema from outside the main grounds to hear the sermons and prayers, thousands of loudspeakers are set up along highways and in nearby areas. People sit on roads, by-lanes, rooftops and tree branches in order to see and hear as much as possible. (Bdnews24.com, 29.1.2006/2.)

In 2008 the Biswa Ijtema was cut short due to rainy and cold weather. By Friday morning several thousand devotees had already arrived at the site and many were on their way to the event. The elders managing committee decided to hold the closing *akheri munajat* prayers on Friday night and call an early end to the event. (Bdnews24.com, 25.1.2008/1.) Many devotees left the Ijtema ground and took shelter in nearby schools, mosques and other buildings. It was the first time in history that the Ijtema was cut short. (Bdnews24.com, 25.1.2008/2.)

Although the Biswa Ijtema is an event that focuses on prayer and meditation and is not open for political discussion, many have questioned the attendance of high ranking political and other officials who are otherwise known not to be particularly religiously active (Bangladesh.com).

The Tablighi Jama'at is generally seen in a favourable light by Bangladesh's political elite, in great part owing to its detachment from party politics. Neither the government nor the different political parties can afford to contest the Tablighi Jama'at, so they all make efforts to maintain good relations. Although the Tablighi leaders claim not to have any political ambitions, their silence on worldly matters, especially state-related matters, plays straight into the hands of the present political establishment. The Bangladeshi political elite has recognized the Tablighi Jama'at as an effective counterbalance to Islamist political groups such as the Jamaat-i-Islami and individuals from within the elite have tried to use this to their own advantage. (Sikand 1999: 121–2.) The Tablighi Jama'at's avoidance of direct involvement in political questions has, however, led critics to accuse the movement of cultivating an indifference to secular affairs (Sikand 1999: 103).

## Tablighi Ijtemas in Pakistan and India

The Tableeghi Ijtema in Raiwind, Pakistan is held in October every year, from Thursday to Sunday, two weeks in a row. According to one local newspaper the Ijtema in 2008 was attended by one million devotees from all around the world (The News, 19.10.2008). According to another, however, the participants were mostly from the city of Raiwind itself (The Nation, 18.10.2008). As in Bangladesh, public figures often attend the Ijtema; in 2008 several federal ministers and religious leaders attended (The Nation, 13.10.2008).

The three-day long Ijtema in Bhopal, India is known as the Aalami Tablighi Ijtema. It takes place on the outskirts of Bhopal at Einthkedi village. Ijtemas have previously been held at the Shakur Khan mosque and the Taj-ul-Masajid, which is one of the largest mosques in Asia. In 2006 the Ijtema surpassed previous records with over half a million devotees attending. Apart from India the participants at the Ijtema come from many different countries, including Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Canada, the United States, Great Britain, Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey. The sermons and prayers at the Ijtema are generally translated into Arabic, Urdu and Hindi. The Aalami Ijtema is also often visited by committee members of the Tablighi Jama'at headquarters at Hazrat Nizamuddin in New Delhi. After the concluding prayers *jama'ats* are formed and dispatched to different parts of India and abroad. In 2006 as many as 200 *jama'ats* were sent out. Many *nikahs* (wedding contracts) are also signed during the Ijtema. (Bari 2006.)

Another large congregation of Tablighi members in India takes place in Mamidipalli outside Hyderabad. In 2007 up to 1.5 million people were expected at the Ijtema. There have been violent encounters with the Viswa Hindu Parishad<sup>4</sup> due to the Tablighi tendency to do *tabligh* work among non-Muslims also, which is not seen favourably by the organization (Andhracafe.com).

## Conclusion

The magnitude of the Biswa Ijtema is difficult to explain, much less comprehend, without having attended the event. The vast numbers of pictures posted on the internet do, however, give us some kind of perception. But pictures of

4 The Vishwa Hindu Parishad is an international right-wing Hindu organization founded in 1964.

the event can only tell us so much, which is why I have made an attempt to gather the information available in other sources in order to illustrate both the historical background of the Tablighi Jama'at in Bangladesh and the importance of the Biswa Ijtema.

If the estimates of nearly 4 million devotees in attendance are accurate, the Biswa Ijtema in Bangladesh would in fact draw more people than the *Hajj* in Saudi-Arabia, making it the greatest Muslim congregation in the world, not in significance but in attendance. This is in itself remarkable, considering where the event takes place and how it is arranged. Although the number of foreign participants at the Biswa Ijtema seems to be increasing, the gathering is still much more of a national event than the *Hajj* to Mecca.

The significance of the Biswa Ijtema is, however, of a different character than that of the *Hajj*. Although I haven't found any particular source that would shed light on the number of *jama'ats* dispatched from the event, we can, based on reports about *jama'ats* dispatched from other events, assume that they are many. Hence the Biswa Ijtema works very much as the core of the Tablighi missionary work. Devotees come here to strengthen their faith, and when they leave, go out to spread the message.

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## Motivation for Pilgrimage

### Using theory to explore motivations

#### Introduction

This article is a discussion of the motivations for pilgrimage and it will draw upon theories of motivation to explore the continuing attraction of pilgrimage in contemporary times.

Before I start to delve further into the issues and the links to relevant theory it is essential to be aware that this discussion is located within the field of Event Management. Event Management is a fast growing discipline which focuses on the design, production and management of planned events, such as festivals, celebrations, conferences, fund-raisers and so on. Clearly pilgrimages, as planned events, fit into this definition. In this context, it is essential to recognise the importance of understanding the motives and needs of event customers so that we can plan to help our customers satisfy their motives. Whilst it might seem abhorrent and commercial to talk of pilgrims as customers, pilgrimages and religious sites, as we will see, have become more and more commodified and increasingly are deemed to need professional management.

Key theories of motivation will be compared in order to identify the prime motivating factors underpinning people's decisions to make pilgrimages. Theories of motivation are divided into content theories or process theories. Content theories, on the one hand, focus on what actually motivates people, seeking to identify and explain the relevant factors. Process theories, on the other hand, emphasise the actual process of motivation, with the aim of identifying the relationship between various dynamic variables, such as values and expectations, which influence individual motivation. Both sets of theory can inform our understanding of motivation in the context of pilgrimage.

Not only is there a greater volume of pilgrims, but an increasing range of pilgrimages—to traditional religious sites and to unusual and secular sites, such as Princess Diana's home in London, Ground Zero, Bob Marley sites,



Dracula sites and so on. Since globally, religiously motivated travel is increasing there is clearly a need for further research.

I am hoping this will be of interest because it is such a fascinating area of study and there are potentially valuable insights from workplace-based studies of motivation that can be transferred to the very different context of pilgrimage. It is intended to show how motivation theories can be used to understand and classify motivations for pilgrimage, which can, in turn, underpin the management of such journeys and events in developing ways to meet the needs of pilgrims on journeys to religious destinations and during their stay at those destinations. It is clearly imperative that, given the rise in this kind of tourism, we understand what motivates pilgrims and to what extent, if at all, and how, their expectations can be met.

Generally, it is agreed that a pilgrimage is a journey deriving from religious causes to a sacred site. It has two elements: the external journey to the sacred site, and the internal journey as a transformative spiritual experience. As noted above, the term 'pilgrimage' is also widely used in broad and secular contexts—for example, pilgrimages to war graves, celebrities' homes, football stadia. (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot 2000.)

It can be argued that, traditionally, the distinguishing features of pilgrimage were that religious involvement was incorporated into the journey and that austerity was involved to a greater or lesser degree. But what do we find today? A quick trawl of the internet for information about pilgrimage reveals a host of advertisements for luxury accommodation, food and amenities for pilgrims both on the journey to, and at, well-known sacred sites. It is not unusual to find facilities described as elegant, luxurious and magnificent!

This is in contrast to the tradition of hardship—such as strenuous walking and labour—that was built into the traditional pilgrimage; early records show that pilgrims (although not always the wealthy) did indeed experience a great deal of hardship. Many pilgrimages in India, for example, incorporate the physical act of carrying artefacts over some distance, such that even children share in the experience, carrying miniature versions.

Furthermore, it is not unusual for pilgrims to deliberately inflict pain on themselves: an example being the pilgrimage to Lhasa's Buddhist temples where pilgrims prostrate themselves flat, standing up at the point reached by their hands, and then repeating these movements in the pilgrimage circuit. Kevin A. Griffin (2007) refers to Dixon Hardy's (1836) rather grim description of a nineteenth century Irish pilgrimage to Holy Island, where pilgrims crawled on their naked knees through rough stones, experiencing agonising pain and lacerations. It was also reported that what was really disliked was the

fact that men came to leer at the female pilgrims, who tucked their skirts up for crawling and, by doing so, exposed intimate parts of their bodies! Quite a different motive for pilgrimage!

Sagar Singh's (2004) study of pilgrimage in India (Hindu and tribal Hindu) supports conventions suggesting that austerity should be incorporated into all aspects of pilgrimage, such as choice of food, places to stay en route, social interaction and so on. He also argues that concern for maintaining the natural and social environment was built into the traditional pilgrimage. Interestingly, this latter issue is becoming a source of concern for pilgrimage management today. Waste, water pollution, overcrowding, the building of facilities, such as hotels, eating places, and souvenir shops, to cater for mass consumption were all identified as major sources of pollution and contamination of the natural environment (Shinde 2007).

Historically and currently, it can be claimed that pilgrimage should have an integrative function, connecting people from diverse cultures and ethnic groups—although Singh's (2004) study indicates that this function is not universally demonstrated in modern India or elsewhere!

Since the dawn of time, it is believed that human beings have defined aspects of their environment as sacred sites endowed with supernatural qualities. Even though the spiritual meaning of some has been lost over time, there is still immense interest all over the world in many ancient sites, such as the statues of Easter Island, Stonehenge in England, Angkor Wat in Cambodia and so on. More and more people are travelling to sacred sites (not always sacred to their own religion, even when they have one), and taking part in religious festivals and events. There are increasing numbers making pilgrimages to their religion's sacred sites. Even the threat of danger does not always deter pilgrims from making the journey to their sacred site. Recent studies of adventure tourism in Nepal found that pilgrimages to Hindu and Buddhist religious sites were less affected than trekking by the threats to personal safety posed by global and internal security matters. (Bhattarai *et al.* 2005.)

This preamble, therefore, leads to my central question: What is it, then, that motivates people from all walks of life, all religions (and none), all cultures to undertake travel to sacred sites?

## **Motivation**

It should be noted that there are limited studies into motivations for pilgrimage: one reason may be because it is a difficult topic to research. When asked,

many pilgrims are not able to articulate their motives, nor may they wish to admit that they need to accumulate merit or remove sin—the traditional reasons for pilgrimage (Mustonen 2005). Motives for visiting sacred sites, however, have been found to affect behaviour: it has been observed that pilgrims, more than other visitors, are more likely to subscribe to overt and covert norms at sites that hold religious significance for themselves; for example, by observing clothing conventions and refraining from taking photographs where this is prohibited.

Even where the prime motivation for pilgrimage is explicitly expressed as religious, it can be seen that motivations and expectations change over time: for example, improved transport facilities and the greater wealth of prospective pilgrims have led to an increasing commodification of sacred sites, thus raising expectations of quality (Shinde 2007).

### ***Definitions of motivation***

Motivation can be defined as the driving force that is within all human beings, that is something that commits a person to a course of action (Mullins 2009: 479–518). Without motivation pilgrims would not be able to achieve their spiritual goals. In the context of event management, motivation theories, however, are commonly drawn from studies of workplace motivation, where the focus is on identifying those factors which employers can manipulate to increase employee productivity. Drawing upon that body of knowledge can help us to understand the motivations underpinning pilgrimage, and, furthermore, to transfer that understanding to the context of pilgrimage management—at the planning stage, during the physical journey, and at the destination. There are many competing theories of motivation which aim to explain the nature of motivation. Motivation, as we shall see, is a complex concept and there is no simple or universal answer to the question of what motivates people.

It is intended, therefore, to focus on those motivations theories most relevant to the study of pilgrimage: these can be divided into content theories and process theories. Content theories focus on identifying what it is that actually motivates individuals and aim not only to identify but to explain the factors that motivate people. Process theory emphasises the actual process of motivation, meaning that it aims to identify the relationship between various dynamic variables that influence motivation.

### ***Content theories of motivation***

Content theories, therefore, focus on the things that motivate people to act in certain ways: they seek to identify people's needs, then to classify them in order of relative strength, and to identify the goals people follow to satisfy their needs. One of the most popular content theorists, Abraham Maslow (1954), focussed on need as the basis of motivation.

In his theory of individual development and motivation (the hierarchy of needs theory) Maslow (1954) asserted that people's needs can be divided into five different levels in a hierarchy of needs ranging from lower to higher order, such that the individual will satisfy lower order needs before being motivated to satisfy the next level of need. He claimed that once a need was satisfied, it no longer acted as a motivator. The hierarchy develops from the lowest, deficiency needs—physiological, safety, and social or belonging needs—to the higher level growth needs—esteem, and self-actualisation. Table 1 shows examples of the outcomes of satisfying each level of need, ranging from the lowest (at the bottom of the hierarchy) to the highest order.

Although Maslow contended that most people's basic needs do run in this order, the hierarchy of needs is not fixed and will change according to circumstances. Higher order needs may change and extend with the development of societies and their particular form of social relations, which will influence the social norms. Whilst there is little empirical evidence to support Maslow's theory, nevertheless it can provide some insights into the motivations and behaviour of pilgrims. Once potential pilgrims were assured that their physiological needs would be met, for example, it can be surmised that their motivation would shift its focus onto higher level needs, such as the opportunity to increase their esteem and status amongst their religious community by taking part in an arduous and or prestigious pilgrimage. Mustonen (2005), however, argues that context needs to be considered, referring to circumstances where

**Table 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (adapted from Maslow 1954).**

<b>Needs</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Self-actualisation	Achieve full potential, creativity, personal development
Esteem	Gain self-respect, self-esteem, status etc.
Social	Sense of belonging, friendship, affection
Safety	Safety, security, stability, protection
Physiological	Food, water, sleep, healthy environment, sex

fulfilling religious needs might actually belong to the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy: this could occur, for example, where taking part in the rituals of pilgrimage is a means of satisfying social and esteem needs. He also points out that in India pilgrims derive from all classes of society and, as such, for the poorest, meeting higher level needs could take precedence over satisfying lower level needs. At the highest level of motivation the experience of pilgrimage itself would be expected to provide satisfaction of self-actualisation needs. Motives for pilgrimage may always have been multi-faceted: the Wife of Bath (of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*) saw pilgrimage as a means of sourcing husbands whilst travelling in safety, as well as an opportunity to obtain grace!

Frederick Herzberg (1974) was a key influence on theories of motivation—his two-factor theory derived from his research into occupational motivation. Factors influencing people's motivation were classified into two different sets: hygiene factors and motivating factors. He claimed that whilst hygiene factors would not actually motivate people, their absence or inadequacy would lead to feelings of dissatisfaction; the motivating factors being those that would positively motivate the individual. Hygiene factors can be approximated to Maslow's lower level needs and the motivators to the higher level needs.

Hygiene factors were identified as: salary, job security, working conditions, quality of supervision, company policy and administration, and interpersonal relations. The motivators were identified as: sense of achievement, recognition, responsibility, nature of the work, and personal growth and advancement.

Although there are methodological criticisms of Herzberg's two-factor theory, it nevertheless led to a focus on how work could be restructured in order to enable employees to satisfy their higher level needs at work and, hence, increase productivity and quality. Clearly, his ideas have resonance for our understanding of the motives for pilgrimage, and, hence, for pilgrimage management.

Applying Herzberg's ideas, it can be demonstrated how his classification could be applied in the context of pilgrimage: for example, an individual's wage or salary provides the means to afford to travel to pilgrimage destinations and to cover accommodation costs. Sufficient income needs to be accumulated to support the pilgrim (and any family) during their time away from work on pilgrimage. Similarly, if we consider the factor of job security in the context of pilgrimage, we can refer to the need, for example, for security of travel arrangements and personal safety at the destination. Applications can

**Table 2. Application of Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation to pilgrimage (adapted from Herzberg 1987: 109–20).**

Hygiene factors	Application to pilgrimage	Motivating factors	Application to pilgrimage
Salary	Income to cover pilgrimage costs, time off work.	Sense of achievement	Personal satisfaction in overcoming adversity, the liminoid.
Job security	Security during pilgrimage and at destination.	Recognition	Photograph, certificate, participation in event.
Working conditions	Quality of travel, accommodation, and at destination; conflict-free throughout.	Responsibility	For own spiritual achievement, for others during pilgrimage.
Level/quality of supervision	Guides, couriers, accommodation managers.	Nature of the work	Pilgrimage, experience at sacred site.
Company policy and administration	Policy affecting pilgrimage, administrative efficiency.	Personal growth and advancement	Religious experiences; satisfy spiritual needs; helping others; acquiring survival skills on pilgrimage.
Interpersonal relations	Fellow pilgrims, local inhabitants, staff and volunteers at all sites, travel agents.		

be devised for each of the hygiene factors as shown in Table 2—this application to pilgrimage is not exhaustive, but shown as an exemplar.

As would be expected, some hygiene factors may cause dissatisfaction and demotivation: the physical conditions encountered during travel, for example, may discourage some. As has been demonstrated earlier, others, however, perceive hardship as an integral part of the experience that, in itself, offers an opportunity for personal growth and the development of survival skills. On the other hand, incidents such as crowd surges at Hajj, which have led to hundreds of deaths and injuries amongst pilgrims, have led to fears of demotivational effects. More recently, there have been warnings about the possibility of infection (e.g. swine flu in 2009) and terrorism at mass pilgrimage destinations.

Whilst these theories do seem to provide insight about the classification and application of ideas relevant to the management of pilgrimage, they are, however, open to criticism. First, criticism is focused on the inability to iden-

tify which need is most dominant in an individual at any one time: since each person is different, due to the uniqueness of their experiences and socialisation, it is difficult, therefore, to generalize. Second, it is claimed that content theories may underestimate the effects of social and cultural factors on motivation: in cultures which value the individual over the group a belief that self-actualisation is desirable may be inculcated, whereas in cultures which emphasise the importance of the group above the individual, self-actualisation would be considered an undesirable, selfish goal (Mullins 2009: 479–518).

Despite these weaknesses, Maslow's work is of value as it provides a pragmatic way of classifying the different needs that people try to satisfy through pilgrimage. Similarly, Herzberg's study has relevance to an examination of motivations for pilgrimage through its separation of motivators and dissatisfiers. Their work strongly suggests that pilgrimage managers have a dual responsibility to ensure that the pilgrims' lower level needs (Herzberg's hygiene factors) are met whilst not stifling opportunities to achieve satisfaction of the higher level motivators. Following Glenn Bowdin *et al.* (2007) it is suggested that, despite criticism, these theories can provide a useful framework for consideration of how to structure the whole process of pilgrimage in order to enhance motivation and limit opportunities for dissatisfaction.

### ***Process theories of motivation***

Process theories, as stated earlier, emphasise the process of motivation, and, in doing so, identify the relationship between various dynamic variables which influence individual motivation. Process theories do not make assumptions about what motivates people, but focus on how people's needs and wants affect their behaviour. Victor H. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory is probably most relevant to our theme. It asserts that what motivates is the expectation (expectancy) of a particular outcome deriving from their actions. The outcome will result in intrinsic or extrinsic rewards which justify the effort put into taking action. Vroom (1964) used the term 'valence' to define the anticipated satisfaction from an outcome. Expectancy can be seen as the perceived probability that the desired outcome would happen if sufficient effort was put into achieving it. People would be motivated to go on pilgrimage, therefore, if they valued the anticipated outcome sufficiently. The emphasis here is on the anticipated outcome rather than the actual satisfaction.

The criticism that such theories are culturally dependent is common to both content and process theories. In this case, for example, it can be argued that the process by which individuals, whether consciously or unconsciously, rate their preferences in a rational way and then decide how much effort to

put into achieving goals is culturally dependent in that this is a feature of more individualistic cultures rather than more collectivist cultures. So, clearly the societal or cultural context is important in any understanding of motivation. In explaining the role of expectations (expectancy), that is, the link between the individual's perception of the link between effort and reward, process theories, therefore, focus on how people's needs affect their behaviour. Pilgrimage management, like event management, incorporates the control of sometimes very large numbers of people in a contained environment and, hence, knowledge of motivation and associated behavioural outcomes should be incorporated into the planning process. It is interesting, therefore, that, where motivation theory is referred to at all in studies of motivation for pilgrimage, Maslow's ideas are those most frequently cited.

In this context, the value of process theory can be appreciated as an aid to understanding expectations and perceptions and, hence, of being able to develop ways of satisfying expectations. Investigations into expectations would be needed to deepen existing knowledge so that policy could be better informed: such research, it can be assumed from earlier studies, may be limited by the methodological difficulties associated with research into motivation for pilgrimage.

### ***Motives for pilgrimage***

Clearly religion is the prime motive for pilgrimage. Religious motive, however, is a complex concept with different layers of meaning and intensity depending on individual belief and social context. Interesting and contentious as this debate surely is, it is outside the scope of this paper and, therefore, it is not intended to delve into this further here.

It can be said with certainty, however, that whilst religion is the underlying motivation for pilgrimage, other motives are often evident: in earlier times, pilgrimages were perceived as opportunities for adventure, personal advancement, the creation of wealth, and for the exchange of intellectual ideas and practical information (such as building techniques, trading opportunities), as exemplified, for example, by medieval Crusades to the Holy Land. Jonathon Sumption (1975) refers to contemporary accounts of the desire for travel to unknown places, motivated by curiosity. Even modern day pilgrimages provide opportunities for adventure, as many pilgrimage sites are located in remote areas, reached only by several days' travel by foot. An account by Conrad Rudolph (2004: 100–1) on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, refers to the problems of finding a place to stay, considering it part of the fun of pilgrimage! At one point during the pilgrimage he recounts how he was taken by the stunning beauty of the woman serving dinner.



Motivation for pilgrimage has been historically linked with religious conflict: many pilgrimages in the Middle Ages followed declarations by Popes about the need to gain revenge for alleged desecration of Christian religious sites. Furthermore, religious practice can be seen to have influenced both motivation for pilgrimage and the experience of pilgrimage; for example, the Catholic Church's granting of indulgences in the Middle Ages affected people's motivation for pilgrimage—Sumption (1975) asserted that an unintended effect of this practice was a weakening of spiritual motivation even though the primary motive was forgiveness of sin. There was no need for the hardship of pilgrimage when people could buy their way out of sin! Of course, for many in the Middle Ages, pilgrimage was the only valid reason for travel.

It can be seen, therefore, that motivation for pilgrimage is complex, multi-faceted, and multi-layered. Pilgrimage management needs to be aware that pilgrims' expectations of the experience will be higher than those of other visitors and should respond accordingly. This is clearly explained by the more intense motivation of pilgrims observed in Yaniv Poria *et al.*'s (2003) study of visitors to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, where it was found that Jewish pilgrims' motivations were derived from the expectation of an emotional experience as the site was part of their own heritage, whereas Christian visitors' motivations derived from the site being an historic tourist attraction. Motivation, furthermore, can change when the individual switches activities, for example, from being a pilgrim to a tourist and vice-versa, often without the individual being aware of the change.

## Commodification

Whilst, historically, commercial trade has developed around some sacred sites, the tendency to maximise opportunities presented by visitors to sacred sites is a growing phenomenon in the modern world. Although this is nothing new—pilgrimages have usually brought opportunities for trade—the pressure to maximise opportunities to raise income from sacred sites is increasing, as can be seen by anecdotal reports of destination managers being urged to put profits first! Alongside this is the development of another trend—that of creating purpose-built religious tourism attractions on non-sacred sites. Such religious theme parks as the Holy Land Experience in Florida, have the 'attraction' of providing the experience without the inconvenience of long journeys, smells, dirt, illness, crowds, 'foreign' food and so on, and without exposure to environmental or political danger.

Interestingly, Griffin (2007) refers to rows of shining SUVs in the car park at an Irish pilgrimage site leading him to ask whether pilgrimage is a fashion parade demonstrating people's wealth. Clearly, then, another, baser, motive for pilgrimage can be surmised, which represents the complete antithesis of spiritual motivation for pilgrimage. In this context, L. Melwani (2001), referring to Hindu travel to sacred sites in India, cites the multilayered nature of motivation for such travel, referring to the satisfaction of both the spiritual and the secular where devotion, opportunities for families to bond and vacation fun are portrayed as part of the experience.

Similarly, Rajandeep Singh (2000) reported that wealthier pilgrims preferred to go on pilgrimage to places which had become better known through the religious literature. This clearly suggests that motivation for pilgrimage can be seen, in these instances, as multi-layered: although primarily motivated by the need to gain religious merit, this is tempered by the desire to travel and, possibly, underpinned by the desire to demonstrate difference from poorer pilgrims who would not be able to afford more expensive travel opportunities. This is not to say that such secular reasons motivate all pilgrims, but that it may be so in some cases and could even be a subconsciously held motive. As people spent more time travelling, they were able to combine pilgrimage with travelling and holidays (Singh 2000).

It has been argued that one of the functions of pilgrimage is to enable all participants to feel a sense of equality and equity with their fellow pilgrims, so that socio-economic backgrounds or states of health were no longer relevant or distinguishers. Interestingly, such claims were made for carnivals. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984: 10) observed that traditionally, during carnival, barriers such as age, caste, or wealth were ignored so that relations between people were not bound by former conventions. Mustonen (2005) reinforces such claims in the case of Indian pilgrimages.

However, as has been briefly referred to earlier, there are concerns that modern day pilgrimages are becoming very different from the traditional pilgrimage. Shinde's (2007) study of Indian pilgrimage and the environment echoes this theme. Increasing numbers of visitors to sacred sites, Shinde argued, do bring about qualitative changes in the nature of pilgrimages—changes such as limited engagement of pilgrims with rituals, organising the pilgrimage more like a package tour, applying modern marketing techniques, and the way pilgrims behave more like consumers. It was noted that pilgrimage was seen as an opportunity to get away from everyday living and, hence, visitors to sacred sites brought with them their urbanised consumerist values, rather than reverting to the simpler values traditionally associated with pil-

grimage. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the purely spiritual motivation for pilgrimage were not affected by such change. It could be surmised that either primarily spiritual motives would be contaminated by commercial development, or the opposite could occur, whereby spiritual motives were strengthened as a reaction against such commercialisation: this may be a fruitful area for further research.

Elsewhere, the influence of the real world context is used to explain motivation for pilgrimage: Nelson H. Graburn (1989: 21–6), for example, referring to the liminoid, argues that the return to, and impact of, real life provides recurrent motivation for people to continue to go on pilgrimage. Mustonen (2005), comparing volunteer tourism and pilgrimage, refers to external motivations, that is the influence of the external world shaping individual motivations and refers to the increasing insecurity of the external world as being as a motivating factor. Alienation, therefore, in these circumstances, might be seen as underpinning the more explicitly stated motivation for pilgrimage. Jacqueline Mulligan (2007) raises similar concerns as she cites examples of advertising literature and travel guides using religious allusions to promote the idea of getting away from it all in an earthly paradise. To draw upon a Marxist concept, pilgrimage can be seen, perhaps, as providing a heart within a heartless world.

## Concluding remarks

In summing up, then, and going back to my original theme—the motivation for pilgrimage—it can be seen that that, in our contemporary worlds, pilgrimage continues to be a growing phenomenon. Motivation for pilgrimage is many-faceted, even though individual pilgrims may be unaware of the complexity of their motivations and/or may be unable or unwilling to articulate their reasons. Studies show that motivation, whether made explicit or not, does indeed affect behaviour on pilgrimage in different contexts. Motivation theories, particularly the content theories of Maslow and Herzberg, despite some limitations, can help to classify motivations for pilgrimage, whilst process theories can facilitate an understanding of the behaviour of pilgrims. It is essential that managers of events such as pilgrimages understand what motivates pilgrims so that they can help them satisfy both spiritual and secular needs without, hopefully, damaging the world's sacred sites. In this context, the increasing commercialisation of sacred sites creates challenges for us all.

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## The Ghriba Pilgrimage in the Island of Jerba

### The semantics of otherness

This article examines the Jewish pilgrimage to the Ghriba Synagogue on the island of Jerba (or Djerba) in Tunisia, with a focus on the semantics of otherness as it is condensed in the devotion to the *Ghriba*, the eponymous local saint of the synagogue. (To make clear the distinction between the saint and the synagogue, when referring to the saint I will use italics.) Claims and evidence exist for the synagogue's being in some degree a shared shrine between Muslims and Jews and I have examined this in another study (Carpenter-Latiri 2010) where I argue that although the ritual of the pilgrimage is rooted in traditions shared by Jews and Muslims alike, the perception of the mixed status of the shrine is inflated to re-enforce a state-controlled representation of Tunisia as a multi-faith and multicultural space.

In this article I shall explore the semantics of the pilgrimage to the *Ghriba* (the 'stranger saint') and in particular, the polysemy of the name and the ambivalence of otherness in the Tunisian context, in particular in representations through discourse in the Tunisian Arabic language as shared by Muslims and Jews. I will argue that this complex and ambivalent representation is the central meaning of the ritual of the *Ghriba* pilgrimage, as the negative connotations of otherness are reversed and amplified into the affirmation of a positive, healing ritual, dedicated to the stranger saint as a symbolic allegory of the otherness of the Jewish community as a whole, or as an allegory of the alienated, exiled, marginalized self. The main healing being performed is the auto-celebration of the local Jewish community; the restoration of the broken link between the migrant Jews from Arab lands and the land of their recent past; the reaffirmation of similar modes of practice between Jews and Muslims, thus validating their religious practices for the majority Muslim community. My research has been informed by fieldwork during the pilgrimage in Jerba in 2007 and several interviews collected during further visits to Tunisia in 2008 and 2009.

## The pilgrimage yesterday and today

The local Jewish community—a surviving minority in Muslim Tunisia—and the synagogue date back to early times and came to international attention in 2002 after it suffered a terrorist attack by Al-Qaida. Locally the pilgrimage is known as ‘ziyarat el *ghriba*’ (the visit to the *Ghriba*; *ziyara*—visit—being the word used for pilgrimages to local saints—Muslim or Jewish—in Tunisia) and is dedicated to the local saint, the *Ghriba*, who is credited with many miracles amongst the locals and the visiting and returning pilgrims. It also celebrates the anniversary of the death of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai on Lag Ba-Omer and commemorates Rabbi Meier Ba’al Haness (lit. Rabbi Meir, Master of the Miracle). The drawing together of these three saints during the pilgrimage amongst the Jewish minority in Jerba deserves analysis. Along with the *Ghriba*, the two other patron saints of the pilgrimage are two mystics who lived in Palestine in the second century and who are also credited with many miracles. Their cult is so strong among Tunisian Jews that they are often taken for local saints: Tunisian Jews celebrate them together<sup>1</sup> as they are both associated with the writing of the Mishnah. During my fieldwork, the celebration of Rabbi Meier was taking place shortly before the procession celebrating both Rabbi Shimon and the *Ghriba* and seemed to attract a more religious, more private crowd (this would need further exploration). As a festival of a highly mediated popular religious culture, the pilgrimage put emphasis on Rabbi Shimon and the *Ghriba*. Rabbi Shimon is more specifically associated with the Cabbalistic book of the Zohar. ‘Djerban Jews, like many other Jews, believe the Zohar was composed in the second century by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai; in fact it is documented to have been written in thirteenth century Spain by Moses de Leon as a collection of Bar Yohai’s lectures’ (Stone 2006: 10). Naomi Stone (2006: 88–101) stresses the similarities between the narratives of the death of Rabbi Shimon and the *Ghriba*, as both are engulfed in fire with their facial features intact, a proof of their sainthood. Stone argues also that the Shimon-*Ghriba* paradigm extends to the incorporation of the cabbalistic conception of the Shekhina, understood to represent feminine, protective and mediating forces for a community in exile from its Promised Land and waiting for a messianic redemption:

The Ghriba, as an associative correlate of the Shekhina, may allow the Djerban Jews an access point to the movement towards redemption, a

1 [http://www.harissa.com/D\\_Religion/rabbimeiretrabbichemaoun.htm](http://www.harissa.com/D_Religion/rabbimeiretrabbichemaoun.htm).

more tangible means of interacting with the Zoharic imagery. In participating in a deeply distinctively Djerban rite, namely supplication of the Ghriba, the community expresses its commitment to both the rich legacy of Djerban Jewry and to an age in the Promised Land, in which the Shekhina reunites with God. (Stone 2006: 101.)

It is the combination of the celebration of the three saints and more specifically the combination of the celebration of the *Ghriba* along with Rabbi Shimon that confer its specificity on the pilgrimage. Indeed the important pilgrimage to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon at the same time in Meron in Israel, does not present the same attraction to Tunisian Jews, even to those living in Israel:

In Israel, Jews from throughout the world celebrate Lag B'Omer with a pilgrimage to the actual tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meron, in Northern Galilee. Yet Israeli Jews of Tunisian descent, rather than making the simple journey up the road, prefer instead to undertake the circuitous journey via Paris, Marseille, Frankfurt or Istanbul to their diasporic homeland, to celebrate the hilula of Rabbi Shimon at the shrine of the Ghriba. (Davis 2010.)

## The pilgrimage past and present

According to the brief inscription near its tribune, which reads: '586 before the common era', the Ghriba synagogue is thousands of years old. It is recognized as Africa's oldest synagogue. Its architecture today is in the Arab-Moorish style: the synagogue was restored in 1920 and rebuilt in the same style after the Al-Qaida attack of 2002. The fame of the Ghriba Synagogue of Jerba is based on numerous traditions and beliefs that emphasize its antiquity and importance among the local Jews, as well as those of the former Jewish communities of Tunisia and neighbouring Libya. The reputation of the Ghriba and its eponymous saint reaches out also to the Tunisian Muslim population, although in recent years the reinforced security that followed the Al-Qaida suicide attack on the synagogue has alienated the Muslim local population from the festival (Carpenter-Latiri 2010). Interviewed by the French agency AFP in 2008, Perez Trabelsi, the President of the Ghriba Committee, mentions that the pilgrimage dates back to 1828, and that the procession originally had the purpose of collecting oil for the lamps burning in the sanctuary. In the early days, the 'ziyara' attracted only Jews from Tunisia and Libya and



it was a rare opportunity for young people to find a soul mate amongst co-religionists. (AFP 2008.)

The Tunisian government advertises the pilgrimage to foreign tourists of 'all faiths' and invites them to come and discover this religious and cultural festival as well as to visit the island. Locally, after the Bourguiba era, which was characterized by a desire for modernity and a rejection of religion and superstitions, the Ben Ali era is encouraging a state-controlled revival of the cult of saints in which the celebration of the saint is closely associated with hyperbolic praise of the president. The change in attitude and context may be illustrated by an anecdote which tells how the fiercely rationalist Bourguiba, in his retirement, on seeing a recently-built hospital in Sousse bearing the name of the local saint Sidi Sahloul exclaimed 'You've gone back to *ra'wani* healing', *ra'wani* being a disparaging term for non-scientific quack medicine. In many shrines dedicated to local Tunisian saints, portraits of Ben Ali are now also displayed; during the Ghriba pilgrimage they were everywhere in the area surrounding the synagogue including the *founduk*, the caravanserai opposite the synagogue reserved for pilgrims and for the festive part of the celebration, but not inside the synagogue itself.

In the international media today, the description of the pilgrimage puts great emphasis on the international dimension and on the participation of Jews from Israel; the local Tunisian media report the international dimension but avoid highlighting the presence of visitors from Israel. Indeed there are no official diplomatic relations between Tunisia and Israel and no direct flights between the two countries. The pilgrimage evolved from the local to the international in the early 1990s. Since President Ben Ali came to power in 1987, both Tunisian and Israeli governments have been keen to promote the Ghriba as a symbol of peace between Jews and Muslims, although trends in attendance show a correlation with the state of tensions between Palestinians and Israel. No officially verified figures are available, only media estimates. A collection of media archives reporting the pilgrimage is available on the Jewish website [elghriba.com](http://elghriba.com). Reports speak of 5,000 Jewish tourist-pilgrims (with 500 Jews from Israel) following the events in Gaza in 2009. At the start of the decade, in 2000, there were 8,000 pilgrims, falling as low as 200 in 2002 after the attack on the World Trade Centre and the attack on the synagogue itself. By 2005, 4,000 pilgrims were present, mostly Jews now living in France, but a thousand from Israel. In 2007, there were 5,000 pilgrims, around 700 of them from Israel, mostly from families who once lived in Tunisia or North Africa, with numbers in 2008 similar (Beaugé 2008) or slightly higher according to the Ghriba committee (AFP 2008). The pilgrimage remains popular

amongst Tunisian Jews living in France or Israel and attracts also Jewish pilgrims originating from North Africa.

### **The Jews in the island: a minority amongst other minorities**

The country known today as Tunisia is on the Eastern side of North Africa and accessible from the Holy Land by land or by sea. The Jewish presence there predates the arrival of Islam, and there have probably been Jews on the island of Jerba since at least the time of the destruction of Jerusalem's Second Temple in 70 AD. The Pentecost story in the Bible (Acts 2:10–11) mentions Jews from 'the districts of Libya around Cyrene'—a large stretch of North Africa taking in present-day Libya and southern Tunisia and reaching to the island of Jerba and sometimes also called Cyrenaica (Carpenter-Latiri 2010). It is difficult to establish a date for the arrival of the first Jews, and there is a possibility that some of the indigenous Berber population might have converted, as discussed by P. Sebag (1991: 35–6) and mentioned by Ibn Khaldun in his *History of the Berbers*. More controversially, Shlomo Sand suggests conversion on a larger scale (2009: 199–210).

Historically, the Jews of Tunisia are mainly made up of two communities: the Twansa Jews who settled in what is now Tunisia before the Arab-Muslim conquest and whose ancestors have lived in the area at least since Roman times, and the Grana Jews, who settled in Tunisia mainly from the seventeenth century onwards, descendants of Portuguese and Spanish Jews thrown out of the Iberian Peninsula and previously settled in Italy (Sebag 1991: 74–5). The island of Jerba is in the Mediterranean, off the south-eastern coast of Tunisia. According to local Jewish tradition, the Jews present themselves as coming from two separate groups: the first group, settled in Hara Seghira, claims an early origin from the Holy Land and the first diaspora; they are *kohanim* (a Jewish priestly class). The second group, established in Hara Kebira, claims a later, western origin (Udovitch & Valensi 1984: 30–1). In the 1970s the Hara Seghira was renamed Er-Riadh, 'the gardens' and the Hara Kebira Es-Sewani, 'the orchards'. The locals use both names, although the Jews keep strictly to the old names. This renaming, especially the choice of Er-Riadh—like the Saudi capital—is still perceived as insensitive by the local Jews. Nevertheless, in the broader picture of the Bourguiba era, the change of names reflected not only the pan-Arabic movement hitting the Arab world more strongly after the 1967 defeat, but also part of the desire for modernisation, translated into secularisation and de-ghettoization. The change of

names also reflects the demographic changes in the population of the two villages, which having once been exclusively Jewish are now mixed; the Muslim population moved in following the waves of Jewish migration (Stone 2006: 33) mainly after the 1967 Middle East war and also after the installation of the PLO headquarters in Tunis in 1982. The departure of the PLO (1994) and the Arab League (1990) allowed the Tunisian State to distance itself from Arab nationalism and to build up an international image of peace and tolerance, and under Ben Ali, it has been keen to advertise its religious tolerance internationally, especially after the 9/11 attacks and also after the Al-Qaida attack on the Ghriba Synagogue in 2002. Promotion of the pilgrimage has played a part in this (Carpenter-Latiri 2010).

Today, referring to figures published in the media at the time of the Ghriba pilgrimage, the estimated Jewish population of the island fluctuates between 800 and 1,000. According to René Isaac Chiche (Balta *et al.* 2003: 252), in 2001 the population in Jerba is 900; 500 in Tunis and a few dozen in Sousse and Nabeul. Referring to the Jerba Jews, Stone (2006: 18–19) defines them as a ‘minority within a minority’, the larger minority referred to being the Berber minority, a Muslim minority within Tunisia. In fact rather than ‘a minority within a minority’, Jerba Jews are today rather a minority amongst other minorities. The majority of the Muslims on the island would define themselves either as Berber and Ibadi, or simply as Ibadi. Ibadis are a heterodox rigorist sect of Islam and Ibadism is recognised in Tunisia as the distinctive feature of Islam in Jerba, whilst the most common form of Islam practised in Tunisia is orthodox Sunni (followers of the Maleki tradition). While the Berbers are acknowledged as the original population of North Africa as a whole, in Jerba today the Berber identity would be only claimed by the small surviving Berber-speaking groups, mainly in the area of Guellala. It appears then that although the construction of the other on the island is binary (‘us’ versus ‘the others’), the semantics of otherness is actually multilayered and more complex. Amongst the Jews in Jerba, the differences between the two Jewish communities of Hara Kbira and Hara Seghira are themselves highlighted. Historically, the island’s population is an intricate network of different communities: Sunni Muslims, Ibadite Muslims, Maleki or Hanéfi (of Turkish descent) Sunnites, Berber-speakers, and Jews from different waves of diaspora (and possibly indigenous converts). Jerba also has a black community, descendants of slaves freed in the nineteenth century. (Mourali & Heyer 2001.) Therefore the island of Jerba concentrates in its enclosed space a multifaceted display of identities and particularisms. ‘The Jerbian Jews emerge as an ethnic group among the other communities of the island, each having at its disposal for internal and

external use an entire array of signs, gestures and words which fashion their identity and govern their interaction with others' (Udovitch & Valensi 1984: 25). In the enclosed space of Jerba, the Jewish minority is more visible, firstly and locally as one of the multiple identities that define the island and secondly and internationally as part of the claimed heritage of the nation. This second element has been put forward in the Ben Ali era through the instrumentalisation and the mediatisation of the Ghriba pilgrimage (Carpenter-Latiri 2010).

### **The Jews on the island: a similar and different other**

As part of a set of different minorities, the distinctiveness of the Jews of Jerba comes firstly from their religious identity, but as much as their distinctiveness is emphasized and displayed for recognition by the others in the island, their similarities with the other Muslim groups are also emphasized within a generic Jerbian identity. Significant features are shared by the Ibadis and the Jews, for example an attachment to tradition and the same formula to express strict religious practice: *nshiddu el din*—'we follow the religion strictly'. I heard this expression, unusual for a Sunni Muslim, used by an Ibadi during a recent visit to Jerba in 2009 and the same expression was also used by Stone in 2004 to fit in with the Jewish community in Jerba:

Although not half-Tunisian, I am Jewish and had lived in Djerba at length. My legitimacy was granted immediately: I spoke in Djerban Arabic dialect, and we knew many families in common. . . . I was often queried about the level of my religiosity; I replied with the Tunisian Arabic phrase: *Nshid a'deen* (I practice or "hold fast to" the religion), providing immediate reassurance to any who questioned my intentions. (Stone 2006: 37.)

Within the Jewish community another differentiation is set up and fragments the Jews into two sub-groups, one rooted in Hara Kebira, the other in Hara Seghira. Analysing the differences between Jews from Hara Kebira and Jews from Hara Seghira, Abraham L. Udovitch and Lucette Valensi (1984: 31) highlight that the inhabitants of Hara Kebira occupy the 'masculine pole, that of civilization and high culture' whilst those of Hara Seghira occupy 'the feminine pole, that of nature'. The interdependence of the two Jewish communities is highlighted as well as the interdependence with the Muslim communities in the island. Trade and, more recently, tourism (including religious tour-

ism) are important sources of income and interdependence for the islanders, although with the heavy security involved in the pilgrimage today Muslim islanders have complained that they are no longer allowed to benefit from the pilgrimage.

Trade has traditionally been one of the keys to the good relations between Jews and Muslims in Jerba: everybody sees the Jews as excellent craftsmen, honest and totally trustworthy for the buying and selling of gold and silver, as condensed in the expression *haqq al-Yahud*, cited and rendered by Udovitch and Valensi (1984: 117) as ‘the law, the justice, the honesty of Jews.’ This is confirmed by another repeated expression collected during my own recent fieldwork, *nass thiqa ou khaddama*—‘these people are trustworthy and hard-working’, which echoes the first expression. A Jewish source explains that the craft of jewellery associated with the buying and selling of gold and silver was for a long time exclusive to the Jews, but I cannot find an explanation as to why Muslims kept away from it.<sup>2</sup> Asked about this, a Muslim jeweller in Jerba told me that, amongst the Muslims, dealing with silver and gold was once seen as taboo in Jerba and associated with usury. This reputation of trustworthiness and reliability for the Jews in an Arab land is worth exploring further. In Tunisia and Morocco, I have heard people trusting only a Jewish doctor or a Jewish goldsmith. Recently, a Libyan flight passenger sitting next to me told me that his mother would only leave him with a Jewish neighbour when he was little. Perhaps, as a minority under scrutiny, the Jews in Arab land could not afford to be otherwise than trustworthy. Colette Fellous in her novel *Avenue de France* (2001: 94) gives a literary account of a dramatic transition by her grandfather: her Tunisian Jewish ancestor does not speak French and does not know if a French *colon* is thanking him or calling him a thief.

- 2 V. Cohen 1992: ‘Les Juifs furent aussi des orfèvres réputés, métier qu’ils pratiquent jusqu’à ce jour. Chose curieuse, jusqu’en 1959, les Arabes se refusaient à exercer l’art de l’orfèvrerie ou tout autre métier lié aux travaux des métaux : il existait en effet dans le monde musulman une croyance répandue selon laquelle il pouvait arriver malheur à celui qui exerçait ce métier. Habib Bourguiba, premier président de la Tunisie, s’employa à abolir cette croyance primitive. Il invita un orfèvre de Djerba (Mordekhai Haddad) à venir enseigner son art aux jeunes arabes.’ (Jews were also famed goldsmiths, a craft they practice to this day. Strangely, until 1959, Arabs refused to practice the art of goldsmithing or any other trade connected to metal work: there existed a widespread belief that ill-luck would befall the one who plies this trade. Habib Bourguiba, the first president of Tunisia, tried to abolish this primitive belief. He invited a goldsmith from Jerba (Mordekhai Haddad) to come and teach his art to young Arabs.)

He then decides to drop the Arabic language and learn French to know what he was called. Metaphorically this tale of a family myth condenses a symbolic choice between ‘honesty’ and ‘dishonesty’ that French secularism, assimilation and modernity would allow, because it allows a non-religious individuality to emerge. Implicitly this would not be allowed to him in a Tunisian context because a Jew in Tunisia would be representative of his whole community and therefore should be responsible for all.

The mixed connotations of the Jewish jeweller (usury and honesty) in Jerba are an example of a mixed and ambivalent representation of the Jewish community, which can be generalised to an ambivalent representation of the Other in Tunisian discourse.

### **Ghriba, the name of the saint and the semantics of otherness**

The word Ghriba refers to both the synagogue that carries this name and a young woman in various legends about the building of the synagogue and the founding of the Jewish community on the island. The classic legend of the *Ghriba* presents her as a solitary young woman that the people of the island allowed to be burnt alive in her hut, before realizing that she was a saint, the proof being that the fire had not disfigured her. This legend creates a link between suffering through abandonment by others and sanctity, as well as one between the supernatural and sanctity. So it is that the Ghriba Synagogue comes to be built on the site where the saint died and the scrolls of the Torah are housed just over the grotto where her body was supposedly found.

In Arabic, spoken by Jews and Muslims alike in Jerba, the word *ghriba* is a polysemic term and an exploration of its connotations and values gives a perspective on some fundamental attitudes. *Ghriba* is a nominalised adjective meaning first of all ‘strange’ and by extension the (female) ‘stranger’. The term is derived from the radical *gharb* meaning the West and which forms a complementary term with *sharq*—the East, which is the direction of the holy places for both Jew and Muslim. In this context *ghriba* acquires a sense of ‘going away’ which gives it another sense, that of the (female) ‘exile’ or the ‘solitary one’. Within the same lexical family, there is also *ghorba*, ‘exile’, a term with a deep connotation of psychological suffering. Exile is often seen as the price to be paid for improving one’s material well-being, an experience shared by many Muslim Jerbians, who traditionally migrate either to the mainland or to Europe, or who may have left because of being banished from the group. Exile is also a characteristic religious feature of the Jewish community in dias-

pora from its Promised Land and in post-modern times it is a newly voiced feeling shared by many Tunisian Jews in France or Israel (their main lands of migration) who are nostalgic for their past in an Arab land. There is a proverb: *el 'ojja tjib el hijja*, literally 'the omelette leads to exile' which expresses the ambivalence of the conditions leading to exile. The term *'ojja* is polysemic and means both the economical egg dish—therefore a metaphor for poverty—and problems. So the exile is either a person of courage and ambition endeavouring to improve their economic condition, or one rejected by their group and under suspicion of being at fault. When applied to the Jewish community in Tunisia, this proverb recalls the tensions between Jews and Muslims following the birth of the State of Israel and the wars in the Middle East. The novelist Colette Fellous remembers the sudden feeling of becoming an alien in her own country during the anti-Jewish riots in Tunis after the beginning of the Six-day War:

Les hommes sont venus de partout, des banlieues, de la médina, de l'Université, ils crient qu'Allah est grand et que les juifs doivent mourir, ils agitent des drapeaux et des foulards, ils sont de plus en plus nombreux, ils courent et la colère les unit, . . . je ne veux plus rester dans mon pays.  
(Fellous 2005: 60, 66.)<sup>3</sup>

Today, when the Ghriba is mentioned as a place of pilgrimage, the word *ghriba* has also become a synonym of 'miraculous'. Tourist Offices and guides usually translate *ghriba* as marvellous, or miraculous and—as their profession demands—only mention the highly positive connotations of the word. There is a concession to the sense of strangeness when *ghriba* is translated as 'the mysterious one', which has a particularly positive connotation in the context of the pilgrimage, religious tourism and exotic destinations. In contrast, *ghriba*, when the sense of strangeness is present (strange, foreigner, solitary, exiled) has somewhat negative connotations for Tunisians. In Jerba, as elsewhere in Tunisia, near and similar are qualities more highly valued than distant and different. This shows in many proverbs, including the eloquent tautology *al ghrīb ghrīb*—'the stranger's a stranger', or *a'mal kif jarak wa illa baddil bab darek*—'act like your neighbour or else move', or *kif qandil Sidi Mahrez, may*

3 The men have come from everywhere, the suburbs the Medina, the University, they are shouting that Allah is great and the Jews must die, they are waving flags and scarves, there are more and more of them, they are running and anger unites them . . . I no longer want to stay in my country.

*dhaoui ken 'al barrani*—‘he’s like Sidi Mahrez’s lantern, it only lights the way for strangers.’ This last proverb is used to criticize someone who fails to look after members of his family but is careful about appearances and his reputation by behaving well towards those outside his group. According to tradition, Sidi Mahrez is the saint who allowed the Jews to build their quarters within the walls of Tunis and was venerated by both Jews and Muslims. The proverb does not mention the Jews explicitly and brings a certain ambivalence to the attributes of the saint. Nevertheless, Sidi Mahrez remains the patron saint of Tunis and to this day is the most important saint in the capital. For Tunisian Jews, Sidi Mahrez is indeed the Saint who protected them and when President Bourguiba visited the ghetto in 1957 he was presented with a gold and silver reproduction of Sidi Mahrez’s mausoleum, with the inscription ‘De Sidi Mahrez à Bourguiba—La Communauté juive reconnaissante—1157–1957’—‘From Sidi Mahrez to Bourguiba—a grateful Jewish community’ (Haddad De Paz 1977: 156). One tradition actually presents Sidi Mahrez as a Jewish saint (V. Cohen 2001).

Endogamy is rated more highly than exogamy, and the proverb *khirna ma yemchich il ghirna*—‘what’s ours is not going to others’, is often used when people are defending endogamy. Some proverbs however do urge mistrust of family members: *al akarib 'akarib*—‘close ones are scorpions’ and advise against marriages within a family: *ib'ed mildam layshawhek*—‘keep away from blood if you don’t want taint’. Thus, in Jerba and in the south of Tunisia where traditional values are staunchly upheld, a recent family planning survey showed that the true rate of endogamy was 10 per cent but that the rate of endogamy declared was 50 per cent: for the sake of the survey, being married to a blood relative seemed more prestigious than being married to a ‘stranger’ (this data was provided by the Family Planning authorities in Tunis from internal survey in 2001). The rate of endogamy for Tunisia as provided by the World Fertility Survey was 36 per cent in 1990 (Courbage 2007: 49). Exogamy is valued when it leads to material well-being and as long as there is no transgression of barriers of colour, language or religion: *lik al ardh alqariba wil mra liba'ida*—‘for you the land next door and the wife from afar’, one you are not related to. The notion of proximity is relative however and it can be stretched: *ma thamma barrani ken the shitan*—‘the only stranger is the devil’. This proverb is the popular counterpart of the famous saying of Terence, the Carthaginian poet of the second century BC: *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto* ‘I am human, I reckon nothing human strange to me.’<sup>4</sup>

4 The Self-Tormentor (*Heauton timorumenos*), act 1, sc. 1.



## Other Ghribas in North Africa and Israel

One of the songs sung during the Jerba pilgrimage mentions two other *Ghribas*, in Annaba and le Kef, which live on in the memory of Tunisian Jews.<sup>5</sup> Long ago, Ghriba was the title of seven Jewish sanctuaries in North Africa: in Tunisia, the one in Jerba, probably the most ancient, one in Le Kef and one in Ariana; in Libya, in the Djebel Nefoussa, Disirt and M'anım; in Algeria, in Annaba and Biskra (Taïeb 2000: 185). Today, the only Ghriba to live on in the pilgrimage of North African Jews is the one in Jerba. However, in 1956 a replica of the Ghriba in Jerba was built in Ofakim, in Israel and another later in Netivot. (Davis 2010.) In 2000, following an initiative by émigré North African Jews in Israel, there was call to raise funds to build a Ghriba in Jerusalem. This project has since been abandoned. In 2007, during my fieldwork in Jerba, Victor Trabelsi, one member of the family who looks after the Ghriba synagogue and organises the pilgrimage dismissed the idea, insisting that the Ghriba could only be in Jerba. The ethno-linguist David Cohen points out that the name *ghriba* is traditionally explained by their geographical situation, far away from populated areas (D. Cohen 1964: 89, note 3). Despite considerable urban sprawl, Jerba's Ghriba is still somewhat apart from the inhabited areas of the island, still some way off from the little Jewish quarter of Hara Seghira/Er-Riadh. The synagogue has a cemetery next to it. One reply to the question of why the shrine is at such a distance from the Jewish quarter was simply 'Only God knows.' Indeed after the 2002 attack, the official government version claiming it as an accident was quickly discounted because of the isolated position of the synagogue. There was no reason for a truck carrying gas canisters to be there.

The *Ghribas* are reminiscent of the many Muslim marabouts all over North Africa called *Sidi Ghrib*, once the rallying point of nomadic tribes. These shrines are probably built on ancient roadside cairns, known as *kerkour al ghrib* (the stranger's cairn), and which have been turned by villages into *kerkour Sidi Ghrib* (cairn of the foreign saint) (Cohen 1964: 89, note 3). The transition from outsider to saint deserves to be explored. The meeting of these two elements is all the more striking, given that North African society overall is built on a very strong communal solidarity which must be paid for by a degree of renunciation of individuality and difference. In this respect the *Ghriba* shares the paradoxical situation of other Tunisian saints notable for their marginality (or eccentricity), which becomes a sign of divine election. This is

5 Available on CD: Djerba La Douce NFB 160868 'Ghribat el Kef H'ibitna.'

for example the case for Saïda Manoubia, the most important female saint in Tunis. In the narratives concerning her, the recurring traits that define her are ‘son autonomie et son refus d’enracinement, communautaire ou familial’—‘her autonomy and her refusal to take root, be it in the community or the family’ (Boissevain 2007: 88). Saïda Manoubia is depicted as mad and powerful, caring and vengeful, mystical and promiscuous (Larguèche & Larguèche 1992: 126). The saint—and his/her sanctuary—are the refuge for the weak, the persecuted and the marginal. The miracles attributed by folk tales to these saints become the proof of their ability to intercede with God and confirms that devotees can have recourse to them in situations—and they are many—where the individual feels marginalized. Prayers for marriage, fertility and the birth of a male son are common and acknowledged miracles would incorporate these. It should be pointed out that these miracles are not investigated in any way by the religious authorities and that orthodox Islam—like orthodox Judaism—does not recognize officially the cult of saints. In North African maraboutic cults the emergence of a saint on the scene is truly the expression of the people.

### The cult of the Ghriba

The Ghriba saint is renowned amongst pilgrims for her healing miracles. She enjoys particular favour amongst young women wishing to marry or to have a child, preferably a boy.

During the pilgrimage, and whenever a special favour is sought, women or men from all backgrounds light a candle or an oil lamp in honour of the *Ghriba*, and place an egg under the shrine holding the Torah under which there is the grotto of the *Ghriba*. Although during the pilgrimage, the eggs are simply placed in the Ghriba grotto and discarded later, the tradition is that the egg would be eaten by the woman praying for a husband or a son and should have her prayer answered by the end of the year. Reverence for the *Ghriba* is shown and kept alive in the many popular songs in Arabic and Judeo-Arabic which tell of the *Ghriba*’s miraculous powers, and which belong to the shared heritage of Jews and Muslims. Apart from its reputation for miracles, the popularity of the *Ghriba* cannot be dissociated from the semantics of her name. Indeed with its senses of strangeness and marginality, the name of the saint itself could offer an intimate experience of reconciliation; the potential marginality of being single or barren could be easier to accept in a place which sanctifies difference, strangeness and solitude. This healing ex-

perience would be of course transferable to the whole community and could act out a call for understanding and empathy addressed to the surrounding Muslim community:

The Ghriba/Shekhina is also perhaps a stand-in for *the entire community*: she is the stranger in an unknown land. Do the Djerban Jews, on some level perceive themselves as this stranger, this private, virtuous young girl who feels to be surrounded by an unwelcoming and indifferent majority? (Stone 2006: 100.)

At the community level, the cult of the *Ghriba* and the whole ritual of the pilgrimage and the visibility of the procession attached to it in the larger Muslim community is also a self-celebration of the community. Analysing a Tunisian Jewish pilgrimage in honour of Rabbi the Ma' rabi d' The Hamma transposed to Sarcelles in France, Laurence Podselver (2001) wonders if this is a nostalgic group engaged in its self-celebration, with the community presence carrying within itself a share of the sacred.<sup>6</sup> Indeed this self-celebration seems present during the pilgrimage with the local community reuniting with members who are now living elsewhere; and with visiting pilgrims nostalgic for North African Jewish modes of celebration. The ritual also resolves the complexity for the Jews of Jerba of claiming two homes: Jerba and Israel (either as the State or the Utopian Promised Land):

in Lag B'Omer, the Jewish community showcases itself *with pride* to the surrounding Muslim community. . . Ultimately Lag B'Omer is an opportunity for the Jews to celebrate their distinctiveness, and the duality of their Jewish and Tunisian identities. . . . During the festivities, the Djerban Jews *both firmly situate themselves in Djerba and celebrate their connection to Israel*. In this, perhaps they resolve the paradox of their identities by claiming two homes. (Stone 2006: 86, italics in the original.)

This is also important for the migrant Jews from Israel, in diaspora from Tunisia or—more broadly—North Africa, who reconnect with their recent Arab past as 'for many North African Jews, the reality of immigration to Israel, whether voluntary or forced, meant not only a physical abandonment

6 S'agit-il d'un groupe nostalgique procédant à son auto-célébration, au point que l'on peut se demander si ce n'est pas justement la présence communautaire qui porte en elle la part du sacré?

of place, but a denial of centuries-old communal lifestyles and traditions—a denial which, even as they sought to reinvent themselves as Israeli Jews, they experienced as exile and loss’ (Davis 2010). Indeed, this experience of exile and loss is also strongly expressed amongst Tunisian Jews having migrated to France, the other main land of migration for Jews from Tunisia, and more particularly women (Conord 2001). This last dimension of healing through the reconnection of the roots in the Arab land echoes with the seme of exile also present in the name of the saint.

Finally, another bolder hypothesis, which would connect the semantics of the name and the miracles associated with the saint, could be that praying to the *Ghriba* implies praying for a difference to emerge: the birth of a male child from the body of a woman. Given the anxiety produced by the capacity of a female body to give birth to the same (a girl) and to the different (a boy), a prayer to the *Ghriba* is a sort of prayer to the foreign (and therefore different) saint for difference (a boy) to come from a woman’s body. Jews and Muslims prefer the birth of male children, with both cultures accentuating the differences between the two genders. In relation to this last point, the evocation of the mystery of the female womb might also be symbolically featured in another ritual of the *Ghriba*’s pilgrimage: the penetration into the *Ghriba*’s grotto.

For those who know Jerba, the features of the *Ghriba* ritual are strikingly Jerbian, and at the same time Jewish. The commemoration of Rabbi Shimon



Meditation by the *Ghriba* grotto and the *Ghriba* lamp. Photo © Dora Carpenter-Latiri 2007.

during the pilgrimage which celebrates his *hilula*—the mystical union with his Creator—is performed like a traditional Jerbian wedding. The ritual visit to the shrine of the *Ghriba* involves a penetration into her grotto—the *maghara*—and is reminiscent of the ritualized penetration of the clay mines practised by the potters of Guellala, an important Muslim and traditionally Berber speaking community on the island: the work in the mines can be dangerous and is conducted through strict procedures and rituals, such as forbidding entrance into the mine in daylight. The texture of the walls of the grotto and its damp darkness are also similar to those of the clay mines. This would explain why the grotto element in the vocabulary of the



**Prayers inserted in the wall of the Ghriba grotto: a new ritual and another bridge between Jerusalem and 'the Jerusalem of Africa'. Photo © Dora Carpenter-Latiri 2007.**

*Ghriba* pilgrimage seems to be unique to Jerba even if there are other similar commemorations. During fieldwork amongst Tunisian Jews in Israel, Stone (2006: 103) notes that: 'In Ofakim, a small village in the Negev, the Jews constructed a replica of the Ghriba in 1956 and maintain a yearly pilgrimage on Lag B'Omer'. As in Djerba, 'a large menara is brought in procession around the town and prayers are auctioned off. People come from all over the place. Though here, they don't have the cave of the Ghriba with the eggs; that is only in Djerba.'

Amongst the pilgrims, many (locals and visitors) return. As in Muslim *ziyaras*, the tradition is to make a prayer with a promise to return to visit the saint when the prayer is answered. At the individual level, and in similarity with what happens with many Muslim North African saints, the cult of the *Ghriba* addresses the need for acceptance and healing for the exiled, the isolated, the marginal; it also addresses the anxious desire for a male child. Through the pilgrimage, the local Jewish community reaffirm their similarity

with the Muslim majority while performing a religious rite that states their Jewish difference, thus allowing them to proclaim their complex identity. Symbolically, subconsciously and through different layers of meaning and representation, the pilgrimage rituals display a belonging and reaffirm a local and dual identity. More recently, the pilgrimage has attracted a new category of pilgrims: migrant Jews from Tunisia or North Africa nostalgic for their past in an Arab land. The complex semantics of the name of the *Ghriba* and the diasporic dimension embedded in Jewish self-representation allow for a polyphonic pilgrimage to take place, in which the enacted diaspora is the exile from the Utopian Promised Land or/and from a lost Arab land located in nostalgia. Today what also seems to be in process is the transmission of a tradition for the children of migrant Jews who would have no direct memories of a past in North Africa. The question remains of what might become of this North African Jewish identity in assimilationist Israel or France.

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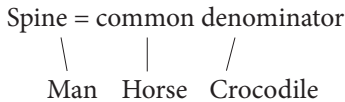
## Unity and Universe

### Understanding pilgrimage to Mount Athos

#### Introduction

Pilgrimage, like many of the concepts used in the study of religions, embodies both the aspect of concept and of word. As a concept it emulates the formation of categories in the natural sciences, in which science is characterized as searching for the 'unity in hidden likenesses', given its aim to find a new unity in the variety of nature, a likeness between things that were not thought of before. The term 'vertebrate' is an illustrative and perspicuous *univocal* concept, because it can be attributed equally well to a man, a horse and a crocodile, the vertebral column being present in its whole in each of these species (Bronowsky 1977: 12; Gothóni 2005: 110; Bianchi 1994: 921).

Figure 1. The univocal concept



'Game' and 'religion', as well as some other phenomena of human activity, are different kinds of concepts. Bianchi argues: 'The term religion (and religious) is better considered at this point of research as an analogical term which overshadows sets of concepts and realities having in common some typical characteristics or aspects, not always the same, sets separated, on the other hand, by differences which reach to the same depth as the similarities. This is a kind of family resemblance which differs from a strictly definable universal.' (Bianchi 1994: 921.)

Interpreting and understanding *analogical* concepts does not mean searching for the 'unity in hidden likenesses', but rather implies an *unfolding of the universe of beliefs concealed in the word* encountered. When we enter into dialogue with a word, our aim is to let the word speak to us in all its lin-



guisticality (*Sprachlichkeit*) so that it unveils the ‘inner existence space’ of the religious person or the religiosity concerned (Holm 1995: 134–7). Here the setting is the opposite.

Figure 2. The analogical concept

The universe of beliefs concealed in the word encountered



In a previous article I have discussed the concept of ‘pilgrimage’ from the viewpoint of searching for the ‘unity in hidden likenesses’. In that article I reconsidered Victor Turner’s well-known theoretical model of pilgrimage as a kind of *rite de passage* and pointed out that the universal characteristic of a pilgrimage is not that it is a transition rite (Gothóni 1995). Neither is *communitas* the specific quality of a pilgrimage.

In criticizing Turner’s conception of pilgrimage I referred to van Gennep, who clearly stated that the one thing in common in the transition rites (*rites de passage*) is the transition from one social position to another, which means transition over a social threshold. Field research by E. Alan Morinis and Harald O. Skar, for instance, has revealed that this is not the case with pilgrimage. Therefore, in order to find the ‘unity in hidden likenesses’ I asked the Socratic question: What, then, should we call the quality which distinguishes pilgrimages and which is characteristic of them all?

After comparing the findings of M. J. Sallnow (1981), E. Alan Morinis (1984), Harald O. Skar (1985), Glen Bowman (1985) and Barbara Nimri Aziz (1987) with my own field research on Mount Athos in Greece, I came to the conclusion that *spiritual transformation* is the specific quality of a pilgrimage. Moreover, I realised that

- Pilgrimages form an ellipse, although they are not transition rites, and that
- Pilgrimages are universal in form, but unique regarding their content of beliefs.

Having found the specific universal unity of pilgrimages, namely that pilgrimages are journeys of spiritual transformation (Gothóni 1993), I began to look more closely at the uniqueness of the content of beliefs embodied in pilgrimages to Mount Athos, particularly with the aim of unfolding the universe of beliefs concealed in the word *proskýnima*, which is the Greek word for



Mount Athos is inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO. Photo © René Gothóni.

‘pilgrimage’. Therefore, I shifted my focus from the concept to the word ‘pilgrimage’, denoting the human phenomena of visiting holy and sacred places, persons, mountains, wells and so forth.

The aim of this article is to illustrate how our preconceptions of the word ‘pilgrimage’ determine our conception of the concept or category of ‘pilgrimage’, which again determines our interpretation and understanding of the content of beliefs of this form of human phenomenon. As a by-product this article is also displaying the process of how our

limited horizon of conceiving the concepts and words is extended in parallel with the process of research. The article aims at showing how this horizon determines our leaving out fundamental elements of ‘pilgrimages’ which, in this case, are characteristic of visits to the Holy Mountain of Greece.

### The Holy Mountain of Athos: some basic facts

The Holy Mountain of Athos in northern Greece is a self-governed monastic republic belonging to Greece. It is a peninsula, the length of which is about 50 kilometres and the breadth about 10 kilometres. On this peninsula there are 20 ruling monasteries, which all of them own their part of the area: the buildings, monastic villages (*skete*), monastic cottages (*kellion*) as well as the farming land and the forests on their properties.



The fence at the border of the Holy Mountain of Athos. Photo © René Gothóni.

Altogether there are today about 2,000 Orthodox monks living on Mount Athos and each monastery also has a number of lay workers helping the monks with the maintenance and the refurbishing work on the monastic buildings and churches. More than 100,000 men visit the monasteries on this Holy Mountain every year.

Mount Athos has been regarded as the oldest democracy in the world. All the twenty ruling monasteries are legal entities of public law, and directly subject to the spiritual jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Although Mount Athos is a self-governed monastic republic, it is also supervised by the Greek state through the Governor of Mount Athos, who is appointed by presidential decree on the recommendation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. According to the new internal regulation of the ministry, the Governor has the rank and remuneration of the Secretary General of a region.

The administration of the entire Mount Athos is carried out by the Holy Community at the capital municipality of Karyes, which is situated in the middle of the peninsula. It consists of twenty monks, each monk being elected as a representative of his ruling monastery for a year. The executive authority on Mount Athos is with the four monks of the Holy Epistasia, which consists of representatives chosen by rotation according to a so called *tetrad* system: the twenty monasteries are arranged into five groups of four monasteries (tetrad) in each of the groups. One of the first five senior monasteries in rank is the first monastery in each tetrad. Each tetrad in turn takes over the Holy Epistasia for a year the Holy Epistasia being headed by the monk representing the senior monastery of the tetrad. He is known as the Protos or first elder, from *Protepistatis*.

The Holy Mountain of Athos is known to many as the monastic republic into which women are prohibited to enter. The reason for this is religious and a fundamental cornerstone in the ecclesiastic legislation. Because the entire peninsula is dedicated to the Mother of God, the monks have since the first monastic buildings were raised considered this to mean that no other 'rival' woman should set her foot on Mount Athos. The prohibition of men to enter and sojourn in convents and women to enter and sojourn in monasteries, the so called *avaton* principle, is an old concept with roots in the earliest stages of the monastic movement. The prohibition is already mentioned in the Canon 47 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council of 692 AD and in the Canon 18 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 AD. This *avaton* principle has faithfully been kept by all the Athonite ruling monasteries until the present day (Konidaris 2003: 14–16).

The question asked in this article is the following: How can we understand the phenomenon of more than 100,000 men visiting the Holy Mountain of Athos every year?

## The challenge of understanding

The concept of understanding refers to the scientific process of acquiring knowledge that is universally applicable and equal both to the natural sciences and the human and social sciences. However, understanding is not the same as explaining and explaining is not a synonym for understanding. Understanding is here used neither in a general sense nor in the particular sense of a method. Understanding comes before method!

In philosophical hermeneutics, the notion of 'understanding' is derived from the German word *verstehen* = *davor stehen*—in Swedish *förstå* = *stå framför* ('to stand in front of'), in Finnish *ümbärta* = *kulkea ympäri* ('to walk around') and in English from *understandan* = 'to stand under'. To stand 'in front of', 'under', or 'to walk around' is to be 'in relation to' and, as we know, in a relation there is always at least two parties: (1) an I, or first person, who stands in front of the other or a subject matter, and (2) the other or subject matter in relation to which an I stands. However, it is elementary to realise that the I is never a *tabula rasa*, but always ensnared in preconceptions, which are the result of the process of learning a language, in other words a mother tongue, and of schooling.

Therefore, the first thing we need to do is to encounter our preconceptions of the subject matter, in this case of pilgrimage, in front of which we stand as a

first person. And we ask: In front of what is the I standing? Strictly speaking, we are not standing in front of the pilgrim only as a person, but rather in front of the words used by the pilgrim. The words expressed are not the property of the pilgrim only, but collective property. What we try to understand is the universe of meanings concealed in the word ‘pilgrimage’ as a word carrying preconceptions related both to Latin and Roman Catholicism!

Our preconceptions determine our interpretation and understanding in the following way. The word ‘pilgrim’ from Latin *peregrinus* (*per ager*) denotes ‘walking’ and within the Roman Catholic theology identification with the sufferings of Christ (*imitatio Christi*) through physical hardship. Hence our—i.e. the Westerner’s—preconception of the word ‘pilgrimage’, is that a pilgrimage is about walking, which means that the pilgrimage is conceived of from a limited horizon of understanding. Preconceptions are always language-bound and conditioned in two ways:

- Historically, reflecting time and space; language and mother tongue; and
- Emotionally, reflecting liking / disliking.

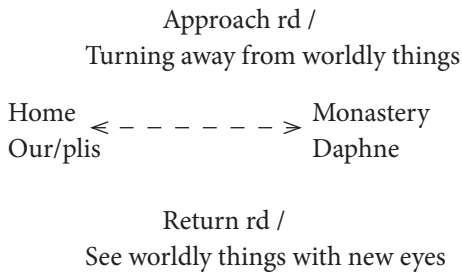


The peak of Mount Athos. Photo © René Gothóni.

## Pilgrimage (*proskýnima*) to Mount Athos

A pilgrimage to Mount Athos follows the universal structure pattern of any pilgrimage, namely departure, journey and return. This structure is depicted in figure 3.

Figure 3. The structure of pilgrimage to Mount Athos



The Greek word for pilgrimage *proskýnima*, from the verb *proskynó*, means ‘to bow down’, ‘to pay one’s respect to’, ‘to worship’ and ‘to submit oneself to’. The first time the pilgrim heading for Mount Athos hears the word *proskýnima* is in the Pilgrims’ Bureau in Ouranoupolis when the official hands over the visa or *diamonitírion* wishing him *Kaló proskýnima*. For some years I took this to mean something like, ‘Have a nice pilgrimage’ without any further reflection. It was only when I realized that there is a distinct difference in meaning between the Latin word for ‘pilgrim’, *peregrinus*, and the Greek equivalent term *proskynítis*, that *kaló proskýnima* began to mean more than just ‘Have a nice pilgrimage’ in the Roman Catholic sense of the word with its connotation of ‘walking’.

The preconception of the word *proskýnima* is not that of ‘walking’, but ‘worship’. The connotations of the word *proskýnima* from *proskynó* are ‘to bow down before an icon or a relic’, ‘to re-enact the events of the Fall’, ‘to rest in the presence of the Holy’ and ‘to pray *Lord have mercy on me*’. *Proskýnima* then does not mean ‘have a nice pilgrimage’, but ‘enjoy your worship’ or ‘may you experience the presence of the divine energies in the liturgy and the Eucharist’. The key word is ‘worship’, not ‘walking’! During a *proskýnima* pilgrims

- Make the sign of the cross
- Kiss the icons
- Kiss the holy relics

- Confess their sins to their confessor or spiritual father
- Take part in the services
- Receive the Holy Communion, the climax of any genuine *proskýnima*

On Athos, then, we encounter another kind of preconception of the word ‘pilgrimage’, namely that of ‘worship’. Allow me to elaborate these lines of thought a bit further with a second example and illustrate how preconceptions determine interpretation.

In 1977, Philip Sherrard discussed the paths on Mount Athos and, somewhat disappointed with the recent development of building more roads on the Holy Mountain, argued that ‘At least 90 % of the visitors to Athos today are not pilgrims. They are tourists. They do not walk along the long, steep, often relentless paths, so that inner change, for the production of which walking is an essential element, cannot take place in them.’

The facts are:

- 120 pilgrims/visitors are allowed to enter Mount Athos per day
- 100 Greek pilgrims
- 20 non-Greek visitors
- Non-Greeks are about 17 per cent of the total number of visitors
- 83 per cent are Greek Orthodox pilgrims

This means that the vast majority of the pilgrims and visitors are Greek *proskynités* and it is totally wrong to argue that most of them are tourists. To come to an authentic interpretation of the pilgrim/tourist discussion and to understand pilgrimage to Mount Athos we need to

- Encounter our preconceptions of the word ‘pilgrim’
- Learn Modern Greek
- Listen to the meanings of the words *proskýnima and proskynítis*
- Learn the structure and content of the Divine Liturgy and take part in the services
- Listen carefully to how the *proskynités* conceive of their pilgrimage to Mount Athos

Without a thorough knowledge of the Greek context, in which the Greek men go for pilgrimage to Mount Athos, our interpretation will inevitably be distorted by our preconceptions of what a pilgrimage is all about.

## Gadamer's ball theory

Drawing on the thought of Aristotle and Rilke, Hans-Georg Gadamer elaborates on the concept of play, which then turns into what I have called his ball theory. The theory is simple: A ball is thrown to us without our taking the initiative. We receive it and this draws us into the game. The game has its own autonomy in that each player submits to the game in the sense of letting him/herself be carried away by the game. Gadamer concludes: 'We have seen that play does not have its being in the player's consciousness or attitude, but on the contrary play draws him into its dominion and fills him with spirit. The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him.' (Gadamer 2003: 109; Grondin 2003: 40–1.)

Analogically to a game, Gadamer argues, a piece of art is thrown to us in the same way; as a challenge to take part in the 'game' of conversation about the interpretation and understanding of it. We experience a metamorphosis, because the play of conversation is self-governed and cannot be controlled by us as participants or subjects. By analogy, therefore, experiencing a piece of art is the same as what happens in a game or a play. While looking, we are absorbed by the experience of the truth in a painting or an icon, for instance.

What does a pilgrim experience on the Holy Mountain of Mount Athos? Following the lines of thought in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, we realise that seeing is given preference over all the other senses on the basis that 'sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions.' About hearing Aristotle says that he who hears thereby hears *more*, in other words also what cannot be seen, namely everything that can be thought of by means of language (Aristotle 1966, I: 1–2).

What the pilgrims see on Mount Athos is

- The landscape, monastic buildings
- Pilgrims and monks, the guest master in particular
- Icons, frescoes of saints in the church and relics of saints
- Monks living a life in prayer; angelic life

What the pilgrims hear is

- Prayers read during the services; *Kyrie eleison* in particular
- Discussions with monks about spiritual life



Apart from the universe of beliefs, conceptions and ideas concealed in the word, hearing also embraces the whole universe of the language. This is expressed discerningly in the Orthodox Creed:

I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible (Divine Liturgy 1993: 29).

Pilgrims (*proskynités*) stand in front of the energies of God present in the icons, frescoes, prayers and the Holy Communion, as a friend taking to a friend, as St Symeon the New Theologian has expressed it. Not as a friend we can see, but in front of the (religious) word we can hear and the energies of God, the Holy Spirit, we can perceive. There is a presence and yet an otherness. To stand in front of is an encounter between two persons. It is not the monks the pilgrims try to understand, but the spiritual world the Athonites are talking about. *Logos* or word is our common inheritance, but we each understand words differently. (Gothóni 2010.)

Understanding happens as a revelatory linguistic event. The meaning of the word (*logos*) is revealed in the dialogue/conversation in that understanding comes as an elucidating surprise.

*Proskýnima* is an act of worship and worship is prayer. Pilgrimage as a concept in the Western sense does not articulate authentically the meaning of *proskýnima*, worship. To worship is to pray, and to pray, according to St Johannes Klimakos, is to engage oneself in a dialogue with God.

Where, then, is language and the revelatory linguistic event articulated? It is not articulated in the consciousness of a person—which is often wrongly implicitly thought to be the case—but in the discussion, in the exchange of ideas that takes place in a conversation, and in prayer, of course.

In the encounter with the word, *logos*, in a *dialogos—logos—dialogos—logos*—understanding, pilgrimage presupposes understanding the word ‘pilgrimage’; in other words, the universe of beliefs concealed in the word which is encountered in quite a specific context, namely the context of the culture studied.

Figure 4. The dialogue of understanding

logos	< – –	dialogos	– – >	logos
(word)		conversation		(word)

## From concepts to words and back

Philosophy has been concerned with concepts since its very beginning. The attempt has been to give an account of the world not merely in words, but in the universality of the words, in scientific concepts. This advance or progress has reached its peak in the exact sciences, especially mathematics and in the natural sciences, in the search for the unity (i.e. 'spine') in hidden likenesses as previously discussed. In the human sciences, on the contrary, the aim is more often to try to understand analogical units and to unfold the universe of beliefs concealed in the words of the language and culture studied (Gothóni 2005: 109). The way icons speak is a case in point. Allow me to give yet another illustrative example.

In September 2005, I went to see an Athonite monk I had been meeting regularly for many years and who was like a spiritual father to me. When I arrived at the monastery, it turned out that he was lying on his death bed with a brain tumour. He was fed by a younger monk and could speak only whispering. I stayed with him for two days and when the young monk saw how distressing this was for me, he tried to comfort me by saying: 'Don't worry! He is in good hands.' I was quite frustrated by these words. How could my friend be in good hands, when he was looked after by a young monk with only a few years of experience in monastic life?

After our farewells I went to another monastery. In the evening service I could not stay in my pew, but moved around restlessly, distressed by the fact that I was about to lose one of my dearest friends. Inadvertently I was standing in front of the huge icon of the taking down of the body of Christ from the Cross (*Apokathélosi*), when the words of the young monk came to my mind: 'He is in good hands.' Indeed he is, I thought. He is in the hands of the Mother of God, as in the icon it is the Mother of God who takes down Christ from the cross. My spiritual father had been just as pale as Christ in the icon and even looked the same in the bed where he was lying. At that moment I realised that my spiritual father was indeed in good hands also for the reason that he was going to be laid at rest in the Garden of the Mother of God, which all the Athonites conceive Mount Athos to be. Physically too, therefore, he was going to be resting in the arms of the Mother of God. My distress disappeared like a toothache at the dentist's chair and I felt a complete satisfaction at having heard the word spoken to me in this revelatory way, so that the entire universe of beliefs concealed in the word was revealed to me. To my own surprise the pieces in the Athonite jigsaw puzzle fitted nicely into a coherent system of beliefs, the belief of the Athonites and all Orthodox believers in the world.



The taking down of the body of Christ from the Cross. Photo © René Gothóni.



A burial in the monastery of Dionysiou.

Photo © René Gothóni.

This experience of the revelatory aspect of words proved to me how icons speak through thoughts that strike us like revelations, invite us to think, to rediscover the movement of the words and to hear the word as part of a wider context of beliefs. To understand really is to hear more! To hear: ‘He’s in good hands’, in the hands of the Mother of God (*Theotokos*) as the Athonites believe, is more convincing than any scientific argument. No proof is needed. The experience of the revelatory linguistic event is the proof, the proof that my friend had really felt he was in good hands as for more than forty years of preparation he had been praying for the Mercy of God and was now finally to be laid to rest in the Garden of the Mother of God, which he had known he was one day to be like all the other monks before him.

## Summary

Why do I insist on calling the *proskýnima* to Mount Athos a pilgrimage? This question was asked by Michael Pye after I had read my paper. My answer is simple. I am not prepared to give monopoly to the Western scholarly and Roman Catholic interpretation of what pilgrimage is or should be all about, both as a category and a word. Pilgrimage, like many of the other concepts in the study of religions and indeed the concept of religion itself, is limited to a Western horizon of preconceptions, interpretation and understanding. This does not do justice to the analogical phenomena in other cultures with different languages. This I have realized when studying monasticism and pilgrimage on the Holy Mountain of Athos in Greece.

There is, however, yet another aspect to consider and this is that by discussing the concept and word pilgrimage in the light of my own field research and in relation to the research process of interpretation and understanding, I at the same time illustrate the method of hermeneutic reflection, in other words the way we may disclose and learn to discern the limited horizons of the preconceptions we are all born into. Moreover, when we encounter our preconceptions by these means, we are widening our horizons and in that process we discover more authentic words; in this case words for the human phenomena of pilgrimage to Mount Athos in Greece.

Analogically, the process of interpretation and understanding is the same in any culture. What we need to do is to ground our research in language, in the interpretation and understanding of words that are the basic elements of language. Apart from searching for the 'unity in hidden likenesses' and agreeing upon *univocal* concepts, which are also needed, of course, we need to scrutinize the *analogical* concepts and *unfold the universe of beliefs concealed in the words* that these concepts inevitably are abstractions of. By these means we reach, for the time being, a more authentic understanding of the word used to describe or categorize the phenomena concerned, the word that reaches the other and the word we can agree upon as being the most authentic word at this particular stage of research.

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## **‘Our Queen of Hearts’—the Glorification of Lady Diana Spencer**

### **A critical appraisal of the glorification of celebrities and new pilgrimage**

**R**eligiosity and spirituality respectively have always been and will be subject to change. The emergence of the manifold forms of new religious and spiritual movements in the last century includes a variety of cult-like veneration of specific individuals, such as politicians (e.g. Mao, Lenin) and modern idols (e.g. Elvis Presley, Princess Diana, Michael Jackson), who are glorified like saints. Devotees gather annually for memorials of their departed idols or travel long distances to visit the tomb, former home, etc. of a specific person to pay tribute to him or her. Due to the motivations of these devotees, the trouble they take, the practices and the tangible emotionality that are connected with this phenomenon, it can be considered a form of pilgrimage. In the following I will present some thoughts about the glorification of celebrities which leads to these considerable forms of cult and pilgrimage, using as an example the case of Lady Diana Frances Spencer (d. 1997).

#### **The death of a princess**

Diana Frances Spencer was born on 1 July 1961. Belonging to the high nobility of the United Kingdom, the Spencer family had no material shortcomings, but allegedly the divorce of the parents was fought on the backs of the children. Diana was regarded as a very poor student; after school she started working in a kindergarten. In 1981 she married Prince Charles and became Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, a title she lost due to the divorce. She gave birth to two sons, the Princes William (b. 1982) and Harry (b. 1984). Apparently Diana did not get along with the Royal Family and her marriage was not happy at all. She felt neglected by her husband, whom she experienced as a callous and distanced man. At some point, it was revealed that Prince Charles was unfaithful to Diana with Camilla Parker Bowles and Diana

herself confirmed that she had had an affair with her riding instructor. After these revelations the Prince and Diana split up and eventually got divorced in 1996. Diana had not known Dodi al-Fayed very long. She only started seeing him a few weeks before she joined him and his family on a vacation in France, where they both got killed in a car accident on 31 August 1997 in the Pont d'Alma tunnel in Paris, apparently chased by the paparazzi.<sup>1</sup>

When news spread about the sudden and tragic death of Lady Diana, people not only in the United Kingdom but all over the world were dismayed.<sup>2</sup> Especially the otherwise rather reserved Britons themselves allegedly fell into a sort of mass hysteria—also critically referred to as ‘a collective moment of madness’ (Freedland 2007). At least that picture was reflected by the media; they depicted the mass mourning by focusing on emotional outbursts of individuals and sold these as a collective hysteria. Charles Monger and Jennifer Chandler, who observed the situation among the mourners during this first week from a rather objective and socio-scientific perspective, note that they had a different impression; they experienced the situation as ‘one of decorum and gravity’ (Monger & Chandler 1998: 104). Not everybody in general grieved Lady Diana Spencer, but in the first weeks after her death it was not possible to publicly admit this. As Tony Walter argues, this was due to the common social rules that follow any case of death—you simply do not talk badly about the deceased and you respect the grief of the mourners. This was reinforced by the presentation in the media that showed a mourning nation and conjured the necessity to join in the sentiment or be exposed as cold-hearted. (Walter 1999a: 19–37.) In fact, people from all over Britain and partly from Europe made their way to London to mourn and pay their respects to the ‘Princess of the people’. They brought bunches of flowers, cards and letters, teddy bears and the like to deposit in front of Kensington Palace, the former residence of Diana, and in the surrounding area of Kensington Gardens.

The trees around Kensington Palace were transformed into shrines by pinning pictures of Diana or the Virgin Mary and notes on to the trunk, objects were hung in the branches, and candles were lit at the foot. Similar shrines were built on the ground level.

Among the flowers holy pictures were inserted, including those of the Virgin Mary and child, the Sacred Heart, Ganesh and Buddha. There were candles, lanterns and votive lights. The symbolism of the ‘Queen of Hearts’

1 For a detailed biography of Diana Spencer cf. Morton 1998.

2 For example, next to the Britons, the death of Lady Di had a strong impact on the Americans, cf. Griffin 1999, Haney & Davis 1999.





Gifts and flowers for Diana outside Kensington Palace. Photo <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/21353436>.

appeared over and over again. ‘The Queen of Hearts’ was what Diana was called in many of the messages, and the playing card of the Queen of Hearts was attached to several of the bunches.

The messages often expressed a feeling of personal loss and included wishes for the afterlife. They were written by people from different national, social and religious backgrounds. In total they revealed a strong identification with Diana as the wronged wife, one who championed causes which were unpopular amongst the establishment or demonized by popular media. Sometimes she was called a saint or an angel. The messages overall show how much time, thought, and effort were put into them. (Chandler 1999: 135–54; Monger & Chandler 1998: 104–8.) The same observations can be made regarding the entries in the Books of Condolence that were set up all over the country, in the British embassies outside the United Kingdom and on the Internet. In London, at the centre of the sentimental outpouring, people were queuing in thousands at St James Palace waiting to sign one of the books, a wait which would take up to eleven hours, even though forty-two books had been set up by Thursday, 5 September. (Francis, Neophytou & Kellaheer 1999: 119; Jones 1999: 203–12.)

Throughout the week Diana was commemorated in the services of every church in the country, culminating in the television broadcast of her funeral in Westminster Abbey on 6 September 1997, which was attended by approximately 1.5–2 billion people around the world—acknowledged as a global community of mourners (Davie & Martin 1999: 187–93; Leach 1997).

At first glance, the week after Diana’s death in September 1997 could be understood as a comparatively normal reaction to the loss of a very popular person, although most certainly to an exaggerated extent. Apart from that, it showed characteristics of cult and pilgrimage; for example the long waiting in line, the ‘offering’ of gifts, enormous amounts of flowers<sup>3</sup> and notes, with explicit religious references and iconography, all-night candlelit vigils, and especially the building of shrines. (Chandler 1999: 147–50.) This impression is reinforced by people having their picture taken, as evidence that they have been there, and especially by the outrage of the people, also reflected in the tabloids, when someone took away items, which ‘suggests that the objects and flowers were imbued with a sort of sacredness’ (Monger & Chandler 1998:

3 By 10 September, the pile of flowers outside Kensington Gardens was five feet (*ca* 1.5 m) deep in some places and the bottom layer had started to compost.

104).<sup>4</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that the public disapproved of dumping the masses of flowers; instead they were composted and used as fertilizer in a remembrance garden, thus 'renewing the cycles of life, regeneration and re-birth' (Francis, Neophytou & Kellaheer 1999: 124). Furthermore, little thought was given to the presentation of the flowers: most of the bunches were left with their wrappings on. Monger and Chandler argue that it was not about the gift, but about the act of making the offerings, which was directed at the deceased and not at the spectators. This is also reflected in the wording and tone of many of the messages addressing Diana herself instead of referring to her in a third person. (Monger & Chandler 1998: 107.) To Chandler and Monger 'the scene at Kensington Palace resembled a pilgrimage, which the people taking part invested with many layers of meaning. It was an act of remembrance which fused many elements of popular and religious culture.' (Monger & Chandler 1998: 108.)

### **A Diana pilgrimage tour**

The emotional release and sentiments triggered by the sudden impact of death subsided relatively quickly; but Diana remained 'as socially alive as she was physically dead' (Walter 1999b: 272). In the following weeks a rather elaborate form of Diana-pilgrimage developed that still prevails, even though to a smaller extent. After 12 years people are still visiting the stations of Diana's life and leave flowers or a message.

A genuine Diana pilgrimage tour might start in central London, where you can follow the official 'Diana Memorial Walk', which was established by the City of London in the year 2000. For your orientation 90 metal plaques have been embedded into the ground. With a length of 11.8 kilometres the walk leads through several parks, passing three palaces, two manors and numerous places where Diana spent her life—some of them of big importance, others rather insignificant. The tour starts at Kensington Palace, Diana's former residence, and ends at Clarence House, the former residence of the Queen Mother, where Diana spent the night before her wedding. On the way you can visit St Paul's Cathedral, where Diana became 'Her Royal Highness

4 In some cases, people from foreign countries were arrested for taking teddy bears. They were sentenced to approximately one month in jail, but in the end only had to pay a fine. Interestingly, one young man from Sardinia was punched in the face after leaving the police station and the offender wasn't arrested or fined for his assault, cf. Smith 1997.



One of the 90 metal plaques signifying the The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Walk. Photo © Maria Vasenkari 2007.

the Princess of Wales' by marrying Prince Charles in 1981, and Westminster Abbey, where her funeral was held. Close to St Georges Square in the district of Pimlico you can take a look—at least from the outside—at the Young England Kindergarten, where Diana used to work until she got married. In Hyde Park the Diana Memorial Fountain, which is the official Diana Memorial, was inaugurated in 2004. Some people think this is not adequate to commemorate the princess and demand an official memorial statue of Diana instead. An unofficial life-sized statue of her and

Dodi as lovers releasing a seagull or an albatross, titled 'Innocent Victims', was set up at London's department store Harrods by its owner Mohamed Al-Fayed, the father of Dodi. Situated on the ground-floor of the same store is a shrine with their pictures, framed by Mediterranean flowers and sculptures; a commemorative plaque and a book of condolence. (Maier 2007.)

Another frequently aspired destination is Althorp, the Spencer family estate, where Diana grew up as a girl and where her remains rest on an island in a small lake marked by a white amphora. Visitors have no access to the actual island; they can only walk around the lake and view the burial place from a distance. It is possible, however, to leave flowers and condolences at a small Memorial temple which was constructed on the grounds. A stronger impression of the princess can be obtained by visiting a museum hosting an exhibition about Diana featuring objects from her early life up until her death. The museum's shop is a temple of commerce, where various memorabilia such as stamps, coins, coffee-mugs, plates, spoons, shirts, teddy bears, perfumed candles, etc. are sold and eagerly bought. (Steuten & Stasser 2009: 11.)

The gates of Althorp are open from 1 July to 30 August. In this way annual gatherings of devoted followers on Diana's day of death, 31 August, are prevented, giving her sons the opportunity to come to the estate and show their respects without any disturbances. Profits from the visitor activity are paid to

the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, with a minimum annual donation of 10,000 British pounds. Since it opened its gates to the public in 1998, Althorp has generated over 1 million British pounds for the Fund.<sup>5</sup>

In Paris people take the tour from the Ritz Hotel, where Diana and Dodi spent the last hours of their lives, to the Pont de l'Alma tunnel. Pictures are taken in front of the tunnel and even inside, where taxis or buses which drive through the tunnel slow down to give the passengers the opportunity to take pictures of pillar number thirteen, the exact place where the car crashed. (Krüger 1998.) Some pedestrians risk their lives and enter the tunnel, even though this is strictly forbidden, to make their way to the pillar and leave messages for Diana on the wall. Outside the tunnel on the Place de l'Alma, the 'Flame of Liberty', an exact reproduction of the flame on the torch of the Statue of Liberty in New York, which was actually given to the city of Paris by the *International Herald Tribune* in 1989, has been reinterpreted as a shrine for Diana and became a tourist attraction. On the 10th anniversary of her death in 2007, *The New York Times* reported from Paris that the messages on the marble base of the flame refer to it as the 'Candle in the Wind', which is the title of a song Elton John dedicated to Diana. Nevertheless, some of Diana's admirers in Paris demand a proper statue of her, because the offerings and flowers are taken away and the graffiti is scrubbed off by the authorities. Another suggestion is renaming the Place de l'Alma after her. (Brennhold 2007; Lesoeurs 2005.)

Curiously even the bench in front of the Taj Mahal, on which Diana was sitting in 1992, having her picture taken, has become a kind of memorial stone. People wait in line to have their picture taken on the so called 'Diana bench'. (Maier 2007.)

Taken together these are some of the stations of Diana's life that have been turned into places of worship and tourism respectively. As already stated, they are still frequented, although admittedly to a smaller extent compared with the time shortly after her death. The existence of devoted followers who purposely travel to commemorate or worship Diana is expressed in all the intentionally brought offerings such as cards and bunches of flowers that can be found at these places. Some travellers themselves tend to define their visits to these places as a pilgrimage—and there are reports of individuals and small groups that have even taken a journey from the USA to Europe, solely for their princess (e.g. Fasano 2006). Interestingly, the majority of these admirers

5 Cf. Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund: <http://www.theworkcontinues.org>; Althorp: <http://www.althorp.com>.

are middle-aged and senior women, a fact that could already be observed in studying the Books of Condolence and the psychological impact of Diana's death (Jones 1999: 204; Shevlin *et al.* 1999: 92–4). Women make up about 90 per cent of the visitors and they come mainly from Great Britain, the United States and Australia (Koydl 2007). There are, however, no reliable statistics about visitor activities and it is very hard to distinguish pilgrims from ordinary tourists.<sup>6</sup> Regarding this distinction, it is convenient to refer to Victor and Edith Turner, who stated that 'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (1978: 20), suggesting that there is no possibility to satisfactorily distinguish the motives and behaviour of pilgrims and tourists, because they are both at the same time—the roles are oscillating. In studying modern phenomena like this, we have to consider that we might impede ourselves by the pursuit to name and categorize everything, and remember that the distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' is an artificial one, originating basically in the period of Enlightenment. The veneration of Diana and similar phenomena that feature religiously connoted imagery and practices simply show that these spheres are intermingling and cannot be strictly distinguished from one another.

### The glorification of Diana

The deification and glorification of humans is a universal phenomenon. Individuals are elevated to a superhuman level and worshiped as the ideal of humankind—their admirers tend to expect miracles and the worshiped him/herself tends to feel obligated to act as the worshiping crowd expects him/her to do (Steuten & Stasser 2009: 10). This kind of glorification applies to 'traditional' saints and founders of religion. Interestingly, however, in a majority of cases, glorified celebrities resemble a sort of martyrs by becoming victims of unfortunate circumstances. The biographies of celebrities like Marilyn Monroe, Janis Joplin, Elvis Presley, John Lennon, Kurt Cobain, Diana Spencer or Michael Jackson, show that nobody, however talented, fortunate or rich, can escape certain strokes of fate. The experience of the generality of this fact leads to frustration and comfort at the same time. In this context, the glorification and commiseration has to be understood as a grand collective gesture

6 For example in Althorp 140,000 visitors were counted when it opened in 1998—four years later there were about 120,000 visitors and by now it is 'relatively quiet' in Althorp (cf. Koydl 2007).

of compassion, which is actually a projection of self-pity and self-victimization in the light of the unpredictability of human life.

In the following I want to illustrate the characteristic qualities of Lady Diana Spencer that, by the means of identification and projection, led to her glorification. Very similar to the case of other idols, Diana's death was totally unexpected and tragic. It happened at an angular point in her life, when nobody knew where she was heading—thus her possible future remains completely open to individual or collective projections and interpretations (Schmitter 1999: 80–1; Steuten & Stasser 2009: 10).

Unlike many other idols, however, multiple roles were distributed to her. Thus the myth of Diana actually consists of several myths; she is able to simultaneously adopt diverse context-sensitive significances, so that there are manifold possibilities for individuals and groups to identify with her and feel compassion (Schirmer 1999: 43–4).

Diana carried some of the attributes of an archetype of perfect womanhood—she was seen as attractive, modest and polite, the very image of a fairy-tale princess. As a wife and mother she didn't act as would be expected of the nobility; she wasn't distanced or cold, but acted just like any other mother. She was seen playing with her kids, eating at McDonalds, participating in a



Mohamed Al-Fayed with the life-sized statue of Diana and Dodi at Harrods. Photo [http://www.alfayed.com/upload/in%20memory/memorials/mem\\_2.jpg](http://www.alfayed.com/upload/in%20memory/memorials/mem_2.jpg).

sack race and so on—she was of the people. Unfortunately she got cast out of the fairy tale by failing to meet the demands of that sort of life, but thus she became an even more important role model for women. She unconsciously personified what is expected of and feared by a woman of her generation; someone who fails to successfully integrate both the conservative ideal of the woman as a nurturing mother, loyal wife and cautious adornment of her husband and the modern ideal of a self-determined, successful, attractive woman in search of self-realization (Habermas 1999: 113–14; Raphael 2000: 90; Schmitter 1999: 68–9). When the problems in her marriage began to show, she didn't hold back her emotions in public, but openly displayed her suffering—she was not shy to show her vulnerability and in doing so she appealed to those who felt equally harmed (Habermas 1999: 111–12). Diana showed that wealth and a noble background do not necessarily lead to happiness; she who seemed to have everything was suffering from depression and bulimia and was seeing a psychotherapist. After she got divorced and cast out of the Royal Family, she was a single mother like so many other women, looking for love and appreciation. Especially women who had experienced similar strokes of misfortune, who had been hurt and deceived, who were divorced and single mothers, could easily identify with those aspects and they loved her for exposing her vulnerability and her feelings, because it was exactly what they felt themselves. (Habermas 1999: 107; Schmitter 1999: 73–5.) Furthermore, women embraced her as a role model for eventually stepping out of the shadow, by getting divorced and breaking away from the Royal Family to reinvent herself as an independent woman (Griffin 1999: 248–50).

Besides her characteristics as a woman, wife and mother which offered possibilities for identification, her public actions were another relevant factor for her glorification. She was responsible for setting up several foundations and she was president or patron of more than a hundred charitable societies. Diana was, and still is, presented as a saint-like gracious, beneficent, and caring woman, who herself deeply suffered, but who still cared for hungry children and victims of landmines, hugging lepers and AIDS patients, sitting down with the poor, with the sick, with the dying. What made her so appealing was her humanity which was acclaimed to be a new form or dimension of charity—she sat down on patients' beds, shook their hands, hugged them and never passed judgment (e.g. in the case of AIDS where patients were usually made responsible for their own mistakes)—it was her authenticity and her closeness to other victims which made her a benefactress and elevated her to a healing saint. (Steuten & Stasser 2009: 14.)



This sort of behaviour and close relationship to the public was in stark contrast to the traditional Royal etiquette. Diana broke with the social and physical distance to the public that she, by tradition, should have obtained as a princess, and she did not judge or accuse anybody but met them with respect. In all she was a very uncomfortable person to the Royal Family, she contrasted with their aloofness and disenchanted them in showing that they were just another neurotic family. Thereby she became a rebel that fought against the British establishment and the outdated monarchy while being their victim at the same time. (Habermas 1999: 109–11; Steuten & Stasser 2009: 13–15.)

Possessing all of these qualities, Diana was compared to Mary as the *Mater Dolorosa*—an innocent mother who revealed her pain and suffering to the people—in the way she was presented to her people. Because of their own frailty and human weakness, both Mary and Diana were sympathetic towards human suffering and showed compassion for the disadvantaged. With her own humiliation, or the staging of it, Diana represented—like a modern *mater dolorosa*—the fate of all the sick and the weak in society. (Steuten & Stasser 2009: 15.)

In this context one might say, that she was a long looked-for female role model or saint that women could turn to and that would give them encouragement. However, the image of the patriarchal construct of the female divine, which elevates qualities like female suffering, forgiveness, nurturing of the disadvantaged, chastity, and so forth, is actually very unfavourable. It represents standards that cannot (and even should not) be met by real women. Thereby Diana herself becomes superhuman and, as Melissa Raphael states correctly, 'reinforces women's sense of spiritual unworthiness, of being *less* than whatever female divinity might be' (Raphael 2000: 96). Additionally, the interpretation of Diana as a modern *mater dolorosa*, glorifies her as a victim, who despite the humiliations she suffered, forgave her tormentors, thus legitimizing the victimization of women in general.

## Conclusion

Diana became the screen for manifold and ambivalent needs for identification—supported, exaggerated, and promoted by mass media and commerce—a modern secular saint that fits the unspecific religious orientations of a modern media-focused society (Steuten & Stasser 2009: 15). As the most photographed woman in the world, Diana's image was globally known and

the visual representations were central to the construction of her myth. As an attractive and beautiful woman, Diana was presentable in the media; people liked to see her and she permitted it, sometimes even promoted it and used it to her advantage. She had a symbiotic relationship with the media, which were not just hunting her to get the latest news and pictures, but also helped her to put herself across both as a victim of the establishment and as a benefactress of other victims. Since her engagement with Prince Charles as a very young woman at the age of 18 or 19, the media were constantly reporting about her. The stories of her life are reminiscent of a soap opera and they had a similar effect—Diana became part of the lives of her spectators and many felt deeply connected to her. (Steuten & Stasser 2009: 13.) This conjunction of the masses and the media had great influence on Diana's apotheosis after her death. Following the principle of supply and demand they formed a modern-day hagiography of a saint that people can identify with—unlike the traditional, for example, Christian saints, she is simply up-to-date.<sup>7</sup>

In total the whole Diana phenomenon does not realistically qualify to be put on a level with the cult of the Virgin Mary, but maybe it is (or will be) comparable to the cult of a local saint with a small and specific following—in this case, framed mostly by senior women of Western countries, who do identify with Diana or admire her for her charitable work. It might however be worthwhile to observe future developments of the Diana cult and similar phenomena. Whichever way you look at it, Diana has not been forgotten. Apart from the visitor activities at the places of her life, this is proved by the continued distribution of books, movies, musicals and ballets that portray her, as well as by several websites and especially the ongoing condolences. (Steuten & Stasser 2009: 9.) Besides this, five years after her death, Diana came fifth in a BBC poll asking for the most important person in history (Steuten & Stasser 2009: 11) and in a poll in 2009, asking 3,000 Britons about the dead person they most want to meet, Diana ranks second—just between Jesus and William Shakespeare.<sup>8</sup>

The largest internet presence of her admirers,<sup>9</sup> featuring the latest news about Diana and anything that is somehow related to her, presented special features of the 12th anniversary of her death on 31 August 2009. On the same

7 Regarding the prominent role of the media, cf. Meckel *et al.* 1999, featuring several articles about the media-promoted formation of a Diana cult; see also Kitzinger 1999.

8 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/5474600/Jesus-and-Princess-Diana-lead-poll-of-dead-people-we-most-want-to-meet.html>.

9 [www.prinzessin-diana-de](http://www.prinzessin-diana-de); [www.princess-diana.com](http://www.princess-diana.com).

website you can find a link to the 'International Book of Condolence' reflecting by daily new entries from people with different national backgrounds that commiseration and admiration prevail. Just recently, on the 12th anniversary of her death, 34 new compassionate entries were made.<sup>10</sup> Very interesting regarding the possible formation and tradition of a cult is one comment from a 13-year-old German girl, who states:

I got to know Lady Di via Michael Jackson—she was mentioned in an article about him. Since I read her name and came to this website, I have cried several tears. It seems to me that Diana was a wonderful woman with a huge heart, always committing herself to the greater good. Thank you Diana, I am sure you made this world a better place! Love, Sarah (13).<sup>11</sup>

Even though the representative quality of this single comment can be challenged, it shows a considerable change in the perception of a deceased celebrity, and presumably more entries like this can be found in the Book of Condolence. The German girl apparently had not heard of Diana before and says herself that she was deeply touched and moved by the stories of Diana's life. These are actually the selection of myths and legends—a certain image—distributed by the media and the admirers who commemorate her. Diana's own human needs and flaws are gradually blanked out. Thus twelve years after she died, a saint-like, or superhuman image of Diana prevails; the legend of the misunderstood fairytale princess elevated to an ideal of humanity. Isn't that how saints are created? It will be a task of the future to investigate the answer to this question.

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10 <http://www.condolence.princess-diana.com>.

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## Stepping onto Sacred Ground

### The *mazar* in Uyghur day-to-day life

#### Saints and holy places in Xinjiang<sup>1</sup>

Like most Turkic peoples, the vast majority of the Uyghur people are Muslim and belong to the Sunni branch of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Islam is a contributing factor in Uyghur identity and is manifested in daily life by a number of regulations on food, observation of religious holidays and life cycle celebrations.

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, the tradition of pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) to the shrines of Muslim saints<sup>3</sup> is a widespread practice among the Uyghur. In

1 The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is situated in the north-western part of China and covers approximately one sixth of the nation's territory. Xinjiang is a huge area of 1.6 million square kilometres and is usually divided into three main areas: the Tarim Basin, the Dzungarian Basin and the Turpan Depression (Rudelson 1997: 17). While the Uyghur constitute the chief ethnic group in the area, the region is widely multi-ethnic in its character. Besides the dominant Uyghur and Han populations there is also a substantial population of Hui (Tungan) who are Chinese speaking Muslims. Among other important ethnic groups are the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Mongolian and Tajik (Rudelson 1997: 22–3).

In the years 2006, 2008 and 2009 I have visited approximately 20 *mazar* in Xinjiang, China as part of preparations for an MA thesis at the Department of South and Central Asian Studies at Stockholm University. This article builds upon these findings. I would like to express my thanks to Äsäd Sulaiman and family, Rahilä Dawut, Jun Sugawara and Devin DeWeese. I also want to mention the great help I have received from various students at Xinjiang University and my other Uyghur friends.

2 The Uyghur language belongs to the Qarluq branch of Turkic languages and bears strong similarities with Uzbek.

3 In Western sources the Islamic holy places of pilgrimage have quite often been referred to as the resting places of saints. It is perfectly in order to use this word if one is aware of the etymological nuances between a Christian saint and the Muslim counterpart. Svat Soucek points out that in Islam, unlike in Christianity, there is no canonization process and subsequently no canonization of saints (Soucek 2000: 38). Within the same discourse, Julian Baldick claims that a significant number of words have wrongly been translated into English as 'saint'. Nevertheless, the concept of *wali* 'God's friends' exists (Baldick 1989: 8).

the same way as with many peoples in Central Asia, the Uyghur also call these shrines *mazar*.<sup>4</sup> Some of these *mazars* attract pilgrims from the whole region, while other shrines have a more local flavour. Regardless of their size the *mazar* have in common that they serve the day-to-day needs of the people that are spread across the land in what John Renard so eloquently has expressed as a formation that may be looked upon as a ‘sacred geography’ (Renard 2008: 188).

One could lay out a detailed map of Islamdom, from Morocco to Malaysia and from Albania to Zanzibar, just by plotting out sites made holy and famous by friends of God.<sup>5</sup> Connected by routes that pilgrims have used over many centuries, these destinations form an expansive network of devotion, social interaction, and trade. (Renard 2008: 187.)

When setting out to explain the popularity of the *mazar* in Central Asia, a popular explanation has been the historical economic and logistical difficulties involved in performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. The *hajj* was, and is still today reserved for a limited number of people who have been able to afford it, or who have obtained the necessary permits to set out on this endeavour. However, this is just one reason out of many that can give clues to the popularity of this practice, since pilgrimage to Muslim shrines is not isolated to Central Asia. It is a strong element in other Muslim societies, too.

I would like to begin this article by addressing one important point—the frequent claim by Muslim reformers, travellers in the region and Christian missionaries,<sup>6</sup> that shrine pilgrimage would be an alien concept in ‘true’ Islam. The American scholar Devin DeWeese importantly points out that, although ‘Islamic literature’ and ‘actual practice’ through the centuries include numerous examples where shrine visitation of saints has been defended (DeWeese 2002: 317) it has been under attack by those who claim to represent what they deem to be so called ‘true’ or ‘pristine’ Islam (Renard 2008: 1–2).<sup>7</sup>

4 Arabic *mazar*, ‘place to visit’ (Harris & Dawut 2002: 102).

5 Renard uses this expression to describe both prophets and saints in the Islamic tradition.

6 Swedish missionaries were active in Xinjiang between the years 1892–1938. See Hällzon (forthcoming) about Swedish missionary views on *mazar* pilgrimage. For more information, see *På Obanade Stigar* (1917).

7 The notion of sainthood, shrine pilgrimage and veneration of saints has been challenged by Muslim reformist groups such as the Wahhabi, who wish to ‘disassociate Sufism from Islam’ (Heck 2006: 152). Wahhabism originated in Saudi Arabia with



In this context scholars such as Devin DeWeese, Marcia Hermansen (2005), and Bruce B. Privratsky (2001) have importantly pointed out that some of the Muslim reformists who preach what they deem to be ‘true Islam’ are a ‘vocal’ minority among Muslims (DeWeese 2002: 317). I argue that this situation is true for Xinjiang as well, although the region is by no means untouched by these movements (see Waite 2007).

Is there a universal Islamic doctrine? Bruce Privratsky has convincingly argued that before the advent of reformist thought in the Muslim world, those that proposed a universalistic Islamic system constituted a minority. Citing P. H. Vrijhof and Jacques Waardenburg (1979: 367) he writes that once ‘normative Sunni Islam was less known and (wide)spread than today’ (Privratsky 2001: 10). In this context Privratsky suggests that historically, ‘local Islam’ with its local fetures has been the norm rather than the exception in Muslim societies across the world (Privratsky 2001: 10). Also Nancy Tapper and Richard Tapper (1987) have observed the tendency among scholars to assume that Islam is an exclusive and universalistic faith. They write that this narrow hypothesis has been preferred by ‘orientalists and theologians’ (Tapper & Tapper 1987: 70) alike, who have invested their ‘focus on the nature and explicit meanings of a presumed unity of orthodox beliefs and practices, dismissing ‘popular’ Islam as peripheral, unimportant, incorrect’ (Tapper & Tapper 1987: 70).

In foreign reports, shrine pilgrimage has frequently been described as a specifically female practice, which merely plays a marginal role in society’s daily affairs. I suggest that it is not unlikely that the exclusion of women in the mosque has enhanced this notion.<sup>8</sup> In a report from 1917 the Swedish female missionary Sigröd Högberg (1917a: 221) writes: ‘(B)y performing the prescribed prayers at home, since women are not allowed to enter into the mosque, and by praying and weeping at the saintly shrines, they believe that they are gathering a good merit in the presence of God.’<sup>9</sup>

the Islamic reformer Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al Wahhab (1703–87) (Lapidus 1988: 673).

- 8 In this context scholars such as Martin van Bruinessen have discussed the problems associated with the common notion of *ziyarat* as ‘a typically “female” practice. . .as opposed to the formal “scriptural” Islam of the mosque, which is allegedly the domain of men’ (van Bruinessen 2005: 3).
- 9 Swedish missionaries from the Swedish Covenant Church were active in Xinjiang between the years 1892–1938. See Hällzon (forthcoming) about Swedish missionary views on *mazar* pilgrimage.

The above-described situation may also be observed today. When I visited the Imam Asim Maziri in Khotan in 2008 there was a sign posted just outside the mosque, which read that women were not permitted to enter. While this only referred to the mosque, women were permitted at the adjacent *mazar* ground. Ildikó Bellér-Hann informs that in Xinjiang a traditionally male prerogative has been to pray at the mosque and to perform the communal prayers for the dead and also the traditional funeral rites at the cemetery (Bellér-Hann 2007: 135 and 2001: 15).<sup>10</sup>

Since the ‘real religion’ is assumed to only take place in the mosque, scholars of religion have frequently assumed that (Muslim) women’s religious life must be un-Islamic or at least be ‘tainted’ with extra-Islamic ‘superstitious’ influences. Literature that deals with Islam in Central Asia has frequently described female religious practitioners as uneducated and prone to engagement in rituals which are supposedly rooted in ‘pre-Islamic tradition’ (e.g. healing rituals at the mazar). In Soviet ethnographic scholarship, for example, it is often claimed that many popular Muslim practices were derived from ‘shamanism’ or pre-Islamic practices.<sup>11</sup> A similar view is expressed in contemporary Chinese (Uyghur) scholarship. Deniz Kandiyoti and Nadira Azimova discuss one of the Soviet ethnographers G. P. Snesarev:

Snesarev argued that the decay of orthodox Islam had left untouched the diverse complex of religious ideas and practices that existed alongside Islam: animism, magic, the cult of ancestors, the cult of saints and their graves (*mazar*). He presented women as the ‘preservers of survivals’ and the bearers of a special ‘female religion.’ (Kandiyoti & Azimova 2004: 328.)

10 Ildikó Bellér-Hann informs that in Xinjiang a traditionally male prerogative has been to pray at the mosque and to perform the communal prayers for the dead and also the traditional funeral rites at the cemetery (Bellér-Hann 2007: 135 and 2001: 15).

11 Some of these Soviet trained scholars have published works in English. See, for example, Poliakov 1992 and Basilov 1992. In this context I believe that Bruce G. Privratsky’s description of Kazak Muslim life is also accurate as a description of Muslim life among the Uyghur of Xinjiang: ‘Muslim customs among the Kazaks are an integral experience of the Muslim life and a local version of the Islamic cultural synthesis, rather than as a survival of shamanism or a shamano-sufic hodge-podge. Like other “world religions,” Islam is more likely to be strengthened than weakened when it is contextualized in local forms and thought processes. Without this departure from positivist, doctrinal understandings of Islam, Islam in Kazakhstan cannot be understood or even properly identified.’ (Privratsky 2001: 237.)

Devin DeWeese has pointed out that the notion of pre-Islamic survivals ‘still prevails in the scholarly treatment of Central Asian religious life’ (DeWeese 2000a: 478).<sup>12</sup> As a response to the common assumption of Islam in Central Asia as a repository of a pre-Islamic past, DeWeese convincingly argues:

I believe that. . .we may properly shift our attention from the possibility of identifying pre-Islamic “survivals” to the more firmly grounded, and more instructive, process of exploring adaptations of phenomena that can be considered pre-Islamic only in the most crude and ahistorical sense; for what we see of them is their Islamized transformation, which in turn signifies not a mere “survival” but a more dynamic process that potentially entails reclassification, infusion with new content, and/or ritual invigoration, all within a conceptual framework defined and shaped by Islam and by shared expectations rooted in Muslim communal affiliation. (DeWeese 2000a: 487.)

### Tuyuq Ghojam Maziri

My first personal visit to a *mazar* took place in the summer of 2006. The place of my ‘pilgrimage’ was the cave *mazar* of Tuyuq Ghojam,<sup>13</sup> also called Ashab-ul-Kähf, located close to the oasis town of Turpan in eastern Xinjiang. Turpan is famous for its fruit production, especially seedless sweet raisins. It is also located in the second deepest depression in the world; only the Dead Sea is located further beneath sea level (Rudelson 1997: 97).

The cave at Tuyuq is intimately coupled with the story of the Seven Sleepers. In the Christian tradition this story is known as the *Seven Sleepers of Ephesus* and treats of seven men who fled from the Roman emperor Decius (alt. Daqianus, approx. 250 AD) whom they had opposed when he had or-

12 I was earlier somewhat influenced by this ‘school of thought’ myself—something which I now have revised. This approach has been expressed in reports by a number of Soviet trained academicians but also by Western scholars. Devin DeWeese uses the term ‘Sovietological school of thought’ not only to describe the position usually made by Soviet trained scholars like G. P. Snesev, Sergei Demidov, Sergei P. Poliakov and others, but also by those Westerners who were inspired by their writings, for example, Alexandre Bennigsen who readily accepted their analysis of religion. See, for example, Bennigsen & Wimbusch 1985. For a critical survey, see DeWeese 2002.

13 Alt. spelling is Khojam. Part of this the description from Tuyuq Ghojam Maziri is found in Hällzon 2008. For more information on this shrine, see Dawut 2001: 201–9.

dered them to worship him and also recant their Christian faith. In their exile they took refuge in a cave where they slept for some hundred years.<sup>14</sup> The story is also found in Islam. The Qur'an reads in sura 18, verse 18:

Thou wouldst have deemed them awake, whilst they were asleep, and  
We turned them on their right and on their left sides: their dog stretch-  
ing forth his two fore-legs on the threshold ([http://www.islamicity.com/  
mosque/quran/18.htm](http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/quran/18.htm)).

The famous English explorer Aurel Stein<sup>15</sup> described the Tuyuq Ghojam Maziri and the story of the seven sleepers of Ephesus in his book *Innermost Asia* with the following words:

Since the many Buddhist shrines and monastic retreats in the gorge were finally abandoned as a result of the victorious spread of Islam, local worship has maintained itself with equal tenacity and success by placing the well-known Muhammadan version of the legend of the 'Seven Sleepers' at the much-frequented *Mazar* of Asahab-Kahaf immediately below the mouth of the gorge (Stein 1928: 614).

When visiting the site in the year of 2006 I witnessed a number of women who were praying with the local *shäykh*. As is the case in other places in Central Asia, the *shäykh* is commonly responsible for supervising religious rituals and the maintenance of the *mazar*. He/she also works in such fields as being a teacher, helping to facilitate family problems, healing of sickness and being present at life cycle rituals such as circumcision, weddings and funerals (Lapidus 1988: 235).

The shrine at Tuyuq consists of a small *gümbüz*<sup>16</sup> with a narrow tunnel that leads to the holy cave. After receiving a blessing the women crawled through the underpass and started to perform a loud *zikr*<sup>17</sup> in the cave (Hällzon 2008:

14 For more information on this shrine and the story (stories) connected with it see Wei & Luckert 1998, Dawut 2001, and Sayrami 2007.

15 European explorers such as N. M. Przhevskii, Albert Grünwedel, Paul Pelliot, Albert von Le Coq, Aurel Stein and Sven Hedin were active in the region (Jarring 1979: 237).

16 A domed structure often erected over the shrine.

17 *Zikr* (alt. spelling *dhikr*) is the central ritual in Sufism. Lapidus writes that 'Recitation of the Quran, *dhikr* (the remembrance of God and repetition of his name), litanies and meditation coupled with the struggle to subdue bad impulses and to suppress

232). The *zikr* is a method which includes special techniques of breathing and posture. It can be performed silently, Zikr Jahri and Zikr Jali, or out loud, Zikr Khafi, and sometimes even with accompaniment of musical instruments such as drums (Soucek 2000: 37; Lapidus 1988: 816). Repeating the phrase *La Ilaha illa Llah* ('There is no God but Allah') the women wagged back and forth in a rhythmical pattern (Hällzon 2008: 233).

'The method was to think of God to the exclusion of anything else, and could consist of a seemingly unending repetition of the first part of the Shahada, *La Ilaha illa Llah*, or of God's name in its many variants such as the pronoun "Huwa" ("He" in Arabic), meaning God.' (Soucek 2000: 37.)

My Uyghur friends informed me that the woman in the cave who was responsible for leading the prayers and *zikr* bore the honorary title *büwi*.<sup>18</sup> *Büwi* is the Uyghur title given to women who are considered to be well versed in the Qur'an and other Islamic matters. It is also a title given to female saints. Rachel Harris and Yasin Muhpul (2002) inform that in Uyghur society the *büwi* are responsible for activities at funerals where they perform rituals reserved for the female sphere. In this context they work as mourners. Another sphere of activity pertaining to the *büwi* is 'healing and exorcism rituals', commonly known as *khätmä*, that are performed 'in people's homes.' The *büwi*



Women performing a *zikr* in the cave at Tuyuq Ghojam Maziri. Photo © Patrick Hällzon 2006.

inner vices were thought to free the deepest capacities of the soul and to prepare it for the vision of God' (Lapidus 1988: 110).

18 The counterpart to the *büwi* is found among other Central Asian nationalities. In Uzbekistan for instance she is called *otin*. Kandiyoti and Azimova (2004: 333) describe the *otin* as a woman who has a sound education in Islamic matters (including sacred written material), and who teaches and deals with issues regarding the female community. In the same way as the *büwi* the *otin* is also present at life cycle events as birth, marriage and funerals and also at religious celebrations.



Votive sweater at Tuyuq Ghojam Maziri. Photo © Patrick Hällzon 2006.

also sing at the popular *mazar* festivals. (Harris & Muhpul 2002; Harris & Dawut 2002: 108–9.)

### Making a vow

The *gümbüz* at Tuyuq is surrounded by a large number of graves of various sizes. The bigger tombs generally belong to rich and influential people in society. As a striking contrast to the dry and somewhat monotonous brown shades of colour that dominate the landscape there was upon my visit an abundance of colourful *lata-puruch* ('rag') and *tugh-äläm* ('flag') on the site. *Lata-puruch* is the name given by the Uyghur to the rags that are found lying on the ground and *tugh-äläm* are rags which are attached to a kind of long pole which is stuck into the ground (Hällzon 2008: 232).<sup>19</sup> The rags and other

19 The *tugh* found in Southern Xinjiang are somewhat different from the ones in, for example Turpan (Tuyuq Ghojam Maziri) in the eastern part of the region. For instance, in the Khotan area the sticks are decorated with stuffed animals such as sheep or chickens. In southern Xinjiang it is also common to see with flags of varying colours attached to long poles at the *mazar*. According to Jarring these big rods (*tugh*) are brought to the *mazars* to serve the purpose of keeping away *jin* (evil spirits)

objects left at the *mazar* are an expression of prayers and wishes and vows, which are expressed by the pilgrims during the *ziyarat*.<sup>20</sup> At the international workshop on *mazars* in Ürümchi 2008, my colleague, Professor Rahilä Dawut brought forward the fact that in Turpan it is quite common that women go to the *mazar* to make a vow. If the vow is a wish for a child, the parents will return to the *mazar* after the child has been born and give the *shäykh* some locally produced product such as fried fruit or cotton, and sometimes even money.<sup>21</sup>

One such *mazar* is the Anijan Ghojam Maziri, which is located in Ayding-köl, close to Turpan. It is a very popular *mazar* among Uyghur women. The shrine is coupled with the story of a woman with long hair<sup>22</sup> who came to Turpan from Arabia in the sixteenth century to engage in religious matters. Her name was Ashchan. When she died she was buried at the spot where the shrine stands. Years later the people in the area built her a tomb in order to honour her. Women come here to pray for offspring and the tradition is that the ones that are blessed return to the *mazar* to give thanks to the saint (Dawut 2001: 227–8).

(Jarring 1935: 351). Jarring explains: ‘Pilgrims consider it commendable to tear strips from their cloaks and to hang them up at the shrines. The wind makes the rags and cloths flutter and flap, and thus the evil spirits (*jin*) hovering round every grave are driven off’. (Jarring 1935: 351.)

- 20 For a similar account, see Tyson 1997. In other parts of Xinjiang, such as in the Ghulja (Ili) area, one may come across miniature cradles at the holy places. These cradles can be found both on the ground and hanging from the trees. Another common feature at *mazars*, or in their vicinity, are holy trees covered with tie-ons. In some parts of Xinjiang it is common to find small stones put together as a symbolic stove together with some weed or grass, which in turn symbolize firewood. Two stones tied together mean that one wishes to find a partner. If one makes a symbolic arrow (which is common in Yengisar and Yarkand counties of Kashgar) and puts it at the *mazar* it means that the arrow ‘will hit the heart of one’s beloved’ (Dawut 2008: 3; personal observation 2008).
- 21 Anne Betteridge writes about the vows of women in Iran. Here the obligation to fulfil the vow is annulled if the vow is not realized. In those circumstances the women may make a new vow (Betteridge 1989: 104). In a similar fashion Fatima Mernissi writes about women visiting shrines in Morocco: ‘She will give him a gift or a sacrifice only if he realizes her wishes, not before’ (Mernissi 1989: 115). When writing ‘him’ Mernissi is referring to the saint. In other cases it happens that the pilgrims ask the *shäykh* to give a name to the child. To return to the same *mazar* and give thanks to the *shäykh* is more common in the Turpan area than in Southern Xinjiang, where it hardly ever occurs (Dawut 2008).
- 22 Long hair is considered to be a sign of beauty in women in Uyghur society. Bellér-Hann (2002: 71) writes: ‘Ideally an Uighur woman should grow her hair as long as possible. Long hair symbolising femininity is traditionally associated with good luck.’

## The holy shrine

The objects in on and around the *mazar* are often perceived to possess miraculous powers. In short, the pilgrims believe that the powers of the saint have been transferred to the objects at the holy places (Dawut 2007: 152).<sup>23</sup> As we have seen in the preceding section, a widespread practice at *mazars* is to leave votive offerings such as a *lata-puruch* or *tugh-äläm*. In his work on *mazars* in Turkmenistan, David Tyson (1997: 11) reports that it is a common practice to leave an object which belongs to a sick person at the shrine. The personal belongings can be toys, pacifiers or clothes. The pilgrims hope that the sickness will leave the ill person and stay with the object instead. I suggest that it is not unreasonable that this practice can be applied to a Uyghur context as well. For example, when I visited the Tuyuq Ghojam Maziri in 2006, I found a sweater among other votive offerings which, judging from its size may have belonged to a 'sick' child.

The holiness of the *mazar* also affects food prepared there and many *mazars* include facilities where food is prepared (Tyson 1997: 14; Kehl 2004: 1).<sup>24</sup> Upon visiting Qäys Ghojam Maziri located in the oasis town of Qumul (Chin. Hami), which is a *mazar* frequented by Uyghur and Hui,<sup>25</sup> my Uyghur friends and I were invited to share polo<sup>26</sup> with the Hui pilgrims who included both women and men.

The main reason for cooking at the *mazar* is to honour the saint of the shrine. Food which is cooked at the *mazar* is holy food. It is eaten during a pilgrimage and shared with other pilgrims. This is considered to be a holy deed. The food prepared at the *mazar* also serves as a means to make bonds be-

23 Rahilä Dawut reports from the Ordikhan Padishah Mazar, where some of the pilgrims who are sick bury themselves in the sands near the site, since they believe that the ground has beneficial powers that stem from the holiness of the saint which is buried there (Dawut 2007: 152; for an account from Turkmenistan, see also Tyson 1997: 9).

24 While it is outside the scope of this paper to discuss all the important aspects of the role of food in various Uyghur rituals—both domestic and those related to *mazars*—I recommend Bellér-Hann 2001.

25 The pilgrims with whom I met at Qäys Ghojam Maziri belonged to the Muslim Hui ethnic minority. In Xinjiang the Hui are called Tungan. The Tungan share their language with the Han Chinese. What distinguishes them from the Han Chinese is their Muslim religion.

26 *Polo, pilou* or *pilaw* is a staple dish in Central Asia that has some regional differences. The main ingredients are rice, carrots, onion and mutton.



tween members of the community (Tyson 1997: 14; Dawut 2007: 152; Harris & Dawut 2002).

### Säydikhan Ghojam Maziri

For most Uyghur communities daily life in the countryside is centred on farming and animal husbandry. In the Uyghur language *dehqan* means farmer and pilgrims come to the Säydikhan Ghojam Maziri to pray every spring before planting their crops and also in autumn at harvest time (Dawut 2001: 210). It is feasible that this event works as a way to strengthen existing bonds within the community where everyone is more or less dependent on a good harvest. As we can see from the following report the tradition of visiting the *mazar* at these occasions does not appear to be limited to Xinjiang:

(A)t a large site (Ismamut Ata) in Turkmenistan's north-eastern Dashhowuz province, we witnessed a mass *hudaiyoli*<sup>27</sup> just prior to the spring (cotton) planting. As the caretaker explained, each spring on the first day of planting and each fall just prior to the harvest, members of entire state farms come on their tractors and trucks to gain the blessing of the saint in their endeavor. (Tyson 1997: 14.)

Most *mazars* are coupled with a written story (*täzkirä*) or *riwayät* (oral story) about the origin and founder of the shrine. The purpose with these stories is not only mere entertainment but the stories also serve the purpose of reinforcing communal identity and Islamic values. The *riwayät* coupled with Säydikhan Ghojam Maziri is about a man called Said Dehqan or Säydikhan (Said, the farmer) who in the same way as the local peasants was a farmer, too. Thus the farmers identify themselves with the founder of the shrine.

One time long ago there lived a man called Said Dehqan. One day when Said was in the south western part of Turpan he came across an area where springs were abundant. Although it was not very far from where he lived it was a place where no man had set foot for a very long time. *Said Dehqan* reckoned that this would be a good place for farming and returned home to his village where he collected his belongings, farming equipment and food supplies to return to the place with the springs.

27 Tyson writes that a *hudaiyoli* means 'the path of God' (Tyson 1997: 14).

Here he began to sow his crops. He worked hard and also constructed an irrigation system. In fall the harvest was plentiful and he enjoyed the fruit of his hard labor. Sometime later Said Dehqan decided that he would return to his home in the village to spread the good news about the area. He managed to persuade some people from the village to follow his example and move to the new place to engage in farm work. Gradually more and more people followed suit and a community evolved. One day Said Dehqan suddenly passed away. The people buried him on an elevated place and constructed a beautiful *gümbüz* in his honor. With the test of time the shrine became more and more popular and people came from far and near to pay their respect to Säydikhan. (Dawut 2001: 212.)

I visited this *mazar* in the company of a Uyghur friend in 2008. We spoke with a family consisting of mother, child, baby, father and mother-in-law, who had come to the *mazar* with their little baby daughter who was ill. These pilgrims appeared to be poor peasants and had arrived to the *mazar* on a small carriage pulled by a donkey. After talking for a while and explaining the cause for their visit to the *shäykh*, the following short ritual took place: Initially the *shäykh* sat silently looking into his open palms. After this he took some water from a small cup that he gently sprinkled three times on the baby girl. It is most probable that the water that the *shäykh* used came from the holy spring, close to the *mazar*. After this the *shäykh* and the pilgrims prayed together. They all looked into the open palms of their hands as if reading the holy book. After praying together the pilgrims and the *shäykh* simultaneously performed the symbolic ritual movement of cleansing over the face. A standard Muslim practice performed on the example of the prophet and also observed elsewhere. ‘Kazaks. . . open their hands automatically when an elder begins to say a blessing [e.g. at the end of a meal], and then brush their faces when the blessing is done, a habit justified on the example of the Prophet Muhammad’ (Privratsky 2001: 21–2).

During the course of the ritual the oldest woman also paid the *shäykh* a small amount of money by leaving some money on the carpet where they were seated. The *shäykh* did not take the money until after the ritual was finished. He concluded by recommending the pilgrims to go down to the adjacent spring and wash the child there.<sup>28</sup> While the ceremony was being performed the

<sup>28</sup> At the Säydikhan Ghjam Maziri there is a spring which is situated at the rear end of the *mazar* in an area full of thick vegetation. In the same fashion as at other *mazars*

old man and the boy had waited outside the walls surrounding the courtyard. Only after the *shäykh* had finished praying with the mother, mother-in-law and the baby, did the male family members enter the courtyard to join the others.

### Sögäl Ghojam Maziri

The following chapter is about a Saturday afternoon in August 2008, which I spent with a Uyghur friend at the Sögäl Ghojam Maziri. The Sögäl Ghojam Maziri is found in the neighbourhood of Üzümchilik which in contrast to the busy straight streets of downtown Turpan is a traditional Uyghur town quarter (*mähällä*), with dusty narrow streets shaded by rows of tall poplar trees. *Sögäl* means ‘wart’ in Uyghur and the pilgrims who come to this *mazar* consider the mud found here to have beneficial qualities against warts and other skin problems.

Although most *mazars* have a male *shäykh*, at this *mazar* a female *shäykh* is in charge. Whereas this is an unknown practice in southern Xinjiang (personal communication 2008) there are some *mazars*, predominantly in the eastern area of Xinjiang where this is the case.<sup>29</sup> During our visit I observed



A female *shäykh* is in charge at Sögäl Ghojam Maziri. Photo © Patrick Hällzon 2008.

in this area, the pilgrims have in a symbolic gesture attached small pieces and strips of cloth in bright colours (*puruch*) to some of the trees and bushes. This *mazar* is popular among women and they often come to wash themselves in the spring water, which they believe has curing abilities. (Dawut 2001: 211; see also Tyson 1997 for a similar account from Turkmenistan).

29 Interestingly, reports from other parts of Central Asia confirm that the phenomenon with female *shäykh*s is not isolated to Turpan. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi reports from the Khorezm area of Uzbekistan that some *shäykh*s ‘some of whom are women, regard themselves as the true guardians of the site having inherited title and function by virtue of their lineage’ (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 244).

that the *shäykh* was not veiled but instead only carried a headscarf, which was tied rather loosely. Her clothes were simple, too.<sup>30</sup> My personal insights gave me reason to believe that the duties of the female *shäykh* are very similar to her male counterpart. She lives in an adjacent house, greets the pilgrims, performs and instructs the pilgrims (male and female) in how different rituals should be carried out.

## Entering the shrine

Before entering a short tunnel equipped with stairs that lead to the building with its typical dome (*gümbüz*) where the saint is buried, one must set down the right foot first. Here the symbolic expression ‘stepping onto sacred ground’ is valid in both a literal and practical sense. This appears to be standard Islamic practice elsewhere, too.<sup>31</sup> In the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, under the entry ‘Muslim pilgrimage’ it reads: ‘Many pilgrims follow the practice of setting out from home on the right foot, a symbol of good omen and fortune. Similarly, it is auspicious to enter mosques, including the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, on the right foot and depart on the left’ (Martin 2005: 7156.)

Inside the *gümbüz* of the Sögäl Ghojam Maziri there was a tomb draped with a large piece of cloth (*yopuq*). The small room was dark and the only sunlight that was allowed to enter into the shrine came through a small opening in the ceiling. On one side of the tomb there was a place where I observed that pilgrims had lit small sticks of incense (*küjü*).<sup>32</sup> There was also a small kind of candle. In eastern Xinjiang these candles are commonly called *jin-chirag* (demon lights) and are made of a small piece of cotton that is soaked in a type of oil or other inflammable liquid and lit at the graves of the saints. It is com-

- 30 A similar pattern may be observed in other parts of the world. In an article called ‘The Controversial Vows of Urban Muslim Women in Iran’, Betteridge writes that while male religious authorities can be recognized by their exterior appearance (robes and turbans), female religious experts do not dress differently from ordinary people (Betteridge 1989: 103).
- 31 Reporting from Kazakhstan Bruce G. Privratsky writes that a ‘young pilgrim said his spiritual teacher (*ustaz*) had taught him also to greet the spirit of the saint with the *Assalam aleikum* (Peace be upon you) and to enter the shrine with the right foot first, a custom from the mosque tradition’ (Privratsky 2001: 171).
- 32 At the Säydikhan Ghojam Maziri my friend and I met a man who belonged to the Hui group. When he lit some incense (*küjü*) at a designated area of the *mazar* we asked him what the purpose of this was. He replied that ‘the fragrance is so sweet that it attracts the angels’ (personal communication 2008).



*Jin-chirraq* and incense at Sögäl Ghojam Maziri. Photo © Patrick Hällzon 2008.

monly believed that this practice will help keep away evil spirits and protect against the ‘evil eye.’<sup>33</sup>

When I visited this *mazar* in August 2008, there were, during the course of 2–3 hours in the afternoon, three Uyghur groups of pilgrims and one group, which consisted of people belonging to the Hui nationality, who came to pray at the *mazar*. The groups included adult women, men and children. The first persons to arrive were a young mother and her young daughter, who, judging from her shaved head, must have been around five or six years old.<sup>34</sup>

They entered the domed structure where the *shäykh* invited them to pray. They all held their hands in the ‘reading position’, which is common practice among the Uyghur when praying. After praying they did the movement of cleansing over the face. The *shäykh* then faced the tomb and greeted the saint by saying ‘Assalamu-eleykum’ (‘Peace be upon you’) (Privratsky 2001: 171). After this she said ‘Bismillahir-rahmanir-rahim’ (‘In the name of God the compassionate, the merciful’) (Privratsky 2001: 124). In the next part of the ceremony the *shäykh* bent down towards a pit, which was located at the far end of the tombstone and gathered some of the beneficial mud with her hand. The mother showed the *shäykh* the position of the child’s ailment, which was located close to the ear, and the *shäykh* smeared some of the mud on the afflicted area. As the final part of this ritual she first touched the walls of the sanctuary and then the tombstone; and then she brushed against the child again as if to transfer the powers of the shrine to her. She concluded by stroking the child’s face and hair and then they engaged in prayer again. The very

33 For more info on the ‘evil eye’, see Jarring 1979–80.

34 Among the Uyghur and other Central Asian people it is common practice to shave the heads of young children so that their hair may become strong and beautiful.

last symbolic move made by the *shäykh* was to bow gently in the direction of the tombstone. This whole ritual took less than three minutes.

The second group to arrive on this Saturday was quite a large family, which consisted of a father, mother, two sons and two daughters. They were all dressed quite casually; the father wore a short sleeved white shirt while the mother had a short sleeved blouse and a skirt. It appeared to me that the mother and the daughters were more 'dressed up' than the boys, who wore casual sport-style clothing. It was interesting to see that before entering the shrine, the parents instructed the younger children how to enter with their right foot first. However, none of them removed their shoes when entering the *mazar*.

In the same fashion as the first visitors, these pilgrims also lined up in front of the tomb and waited for the *shäykh* to commence the ritual by saying 'Assalamu-eykum'. After having given this greeting to the saint, the *shäykh* collected holy mud from the round pit in the ground and smeared it on the afflicted place of the first pilgrim. Mud was also taken from the walls of the *mazar* and placed on the pilgrim's afflicted limb. The same procedure was repeated various times until everyone in the group had been tended to. All of the pilgrims prayed together. After finishing they lifted their hands to perform the symbolic ritual of cleaning over the face. The whole procedure was done quite swiftly and afterwards the pilgrims gave the *shäykh* a symbolic amount of money. They exited the *mazar* without turning their backs on the saint's tomb.

A bit later another group of people arrived in the *mazar* and a somewhat different ritual took place. This group had travelled all the way from the city of Ürümchi to visit the *mazar*. The *shäykh* went outside to greet the pilgrims, touching the hands of the women but not the men's. The men wore the traditional Uyghur skullcaps called *doppa*.<sup>35</sup> The women were modestly dressed, but not veiled.

The *shäykh* and the pilgrims proceeded to the shrine where they sat down together on the floor and engaged in prayer. One of the men took the lead; he started to recite the Qur'an in a melodic way while the others sat quietly.

35 The brimless skullcap *doppa* is the most obvious marker of Uyghur ethnic identity and is also demonstrated in state propaganda. In a picture from the book *Oasis Identities* (Rudelson 1997) two seemingly identical families are depicted on a billboard. The only way to distinguish the ethnicity of the two families consists of two facts. The Uyghur family has two children, thus reflecting the Chinese government's supposed position regarding family planning and minorities. Whereas the Chinese are only allowed to have one child, the minorities are allowed to have two children. The second difference is the fact that the Uyghur man on the picture has a *doppa* and the Chinese man does not. (Rudelson 1997: 106.)

This ceremony was significantly longer than the former ones and was different structurally, too, since it did not include any utilization of the mud.

The last group to arrive this Saturday afternoon was a group consisting of Hui pilgrims. For the first time that day I was turned down when asking the pilgrims if it would be permissible to join them. They apparently did not want me to take pictures either. Similarly to the other pilgrims their visit was short. They entered the shrine and approximately ten minutes later they left the area.

## Islam and healing

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the *mazar* serves as a venue for ‘healing.’ Many reports on *mazars* also note the pre-dominance of women. I suggest that this might have led to the widespread and quite general assumption that women are interested in healing while men are not.<sup>36</sup> In a report from 1917 the Swedish missionary Sigrid Högberg writes:

The saintly shrines are popular among women. The infertile pray there that they may receive the fruit of life, the rejected pray that their men shall love them again; and those who do not have a husband pray that they will be provided with one. (Högberg 1917a: 221; see also Gustafsson 1917: 227–8.)

The notion that women are only interested in, or even worse, confined to a ‘superstitious’ domain (the *mazar* and the home) where healing takes a central position *vis-à-vis* the ‘real’ theological dimensions practiced by men (at the mosque) is quite common. It has been implied that ‘real religiosity’ is not so overtly concerned with issues dealing with health and childbearing. Moreover, within the context of categorization of ‘orthodox’ and ‘popular’ religion, scholars have often suggested that the above-described issues coupled with healing should be separated from ‘real religious motives’ (DeWeese 2002: 319). This way of looking upon things has been questioned by Devin DeWeese who argues that:

The basic language of distinguishing ‘religious’ from ‘non-religious’ motives for the performance of religious rites obviously begs the question

36 For a discussion, see Sered 1994: 118.

of what a religious motive is. Is it one based somehow in theology, for example in hope of heaven or fear of hell? Is it one rooted in altruism or selflessness? Is it a motive that is solely 'spiritual' in its understanding? If so, then we have implicitly cut off the social component that was supposedly our focus. If we so etherealize religiosity that we exclude a desire for health, economic success, fertility, or social harmony and camaraderie from the range of motivations that can be labeled 'religious', we have demolished or devalued much of what makes religious practice interesting throughout the world. (DeWeese 2002: 319.)

In consonance with the notions, described above, of 'un-Islamic' practices, some contemporary Muslim voices have expressed the opinion that some techniques of healing would be alien to Islam. As a response to this Marcia Hermansen points out in a paper about Islamic healing in America (2005: 408) the wide range of healing techniques used by Muslim spiritual healers who, according to her, range from 'Sufi *pirs*,<sup>37</sup> traditional religious scholars, or practitioners of occult arts (*amils*)' and some of these healers 'proffer types of spells such as amulets or prayers' (Hermansen 2005: 411). She explains also that 'mainstream Islamic practices' such as the *zīkr* or reciting of the *Qur'an* are widely utilized by Muslims as a healing method (Hermansen 2005: 411).<sup>38</sup>

In the Uyghur scholar Rahilä Dawut's book, *Uyghur Mazarliri* (Uyghur Mazars) there is an illustration of this. The caption coupled with the photo reads: *Mazarda kesälgä demidä qiliwatqan shäykh* ('The *shäykh* of the *mazar* breathing on a sick person') (Dawut 2001: 195).

The practice of healing by breathing on the patient appears to be a standard practice among Muslims elsewhere too. Bruce G. Privratsky writing on Islam among the neighbouring Kazakh people says:

[T]he technique of healing by reciting the Quran and breathing on the patient is a standard practice of Muslim folk healers everywhere, as is the Islamic version of the humoral theory of diet and disease with which it is wedded in practice (Privratsky 2001: 243–4).

37 *Pir* is a title commonly given to Sufi leaders.

38 Associating the *zīkr* with health is also confirmed in a report by Harris and Dawut where an informant claimed that the reason for his grandfather reaching the age of 120 years was because he had practiced the *zīkr* every week of his life (Harris & Dawut 2002: 108).



Marcia Hermansen points out that there are also other forms of belief which are often classified as ‘folk belief’, but which may be legitimate—as in the case of belief in the evil eye, which gains legitimacy by virtue of the fact that it is mentioned in the prophetic tradition. Likewise, she brings attention to chapter 113 of the Qur’an, which ‘mentions the evil of women who blow on knots (cast spells)’ (Hermansen 2005: 411).

[T]he prophet Muhammad recommended certain phrases or litanies to counter this. Therefore, many of these practices have a religious legitimacy, although local traditions certainly embellish them. . . [Therefore it] is difficult to characterize the techniques of spiritual healers as ‘folk’ as opposed to ‘official’, although some of their beliefs and practices may be criticized by contemporary Islamic literalists. (Hermansen 2005: 411).

### ***Mazar säylisi***

The pilgrims from Ürümchi who visited the Sögäl Ghojam Maziri informed us that they were on a pilgrimage tour. That basically meant that they were on a round trip visiting many *mazars* in the area including the shrine of Sögäl Ghojam. The tradition of visiting multiple *mazars* in sequence is quite common among Uyghurs in Xinjiang. This tradition is in some cases considered as being equally important as performing the *hajj* (personal information 2008). This does not, however, have to be understood as a negation of the importance of the *hajj*. Although the following quote by Privratsky refers to the Kazak, I propose that the same is true for the Uyghur people as well: ‘When the Kazaks call a local pilgrimage site a second Mecca, it is an identification of the place with Mecca, and of *ziyarat* with the *hajj*, not a competing claim’ (Privratsky 2001: 244).

I have learned that, as a consequence of tougher official policies regarding religion, it is rather common to use the pretext of going on vacation when one is, in fact, actually off to visit *mazars* (Ürümchi Workshop 2008). Visitation to *mazars* can be performed quickly, as described above, or it may go on for days, or for months. Sometimes the pilgrims actually have travelled a long way to see their saint, as in the case of the people from Ürümchi, while other visits are short and merry and seem only to substitute a short break in daily routine. Such short visits are called *mazar tawabiti* (worship) (Harris & Dawut 2002: 102). The Uyghur scholar Rahilä Dawut has noted that some of the smaller *mazars* have no set date for pilgrimage (while other *mazars* have

fixed periods for visitation that often coincide with the saint's death). Some of these annual events are known as *mazar* festivals (*mazar säylisi*; pilgrimage) and attract tens of thousands of people simultaneously. (Dawut 2007: 151; Harris & Dawut 2002: 102.) One example is the annual Ordikhan Mazar festival that takes place in Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar.<sup>39</sup> It is an event which includes participation by both young and old men and women. The people all have very different motives for performing the *ziyarat*: 'Old men come to pray; young people come to the Ordam to have fun and look for potential partners; women come to make a wish to the saint for a child' (Dawut 2007: 152).

These religious festivals serve both as *mazar* and bazaars and function as important focal points in a number of ways. Dawut reports that at the festivals food 'stalls are set up' (Dawut 2007: 153) and a wide range of activities such as cock-fights, wrestling, tightrope walking, 'goat tussling' and music are performed (Dawut 2007: 152–3).<sup>40</sup> The *mazar* festivals (*mazar säylisi*) serve a multitude of purposes. Importantly they serve as meeting points for people both on the communal and personal level and people that normally do not have a chance or cannot meet due to geographical distance or cultural taboos concerning, for example, courting get an opportunity to exchange contacts here.<sup>41</sup> Young people are attracted to the *mazar* because it is a place where they can identify a potential partner to marry. Dawut points out that the festivals thus serve as 'breathing spots' in 'the monotonous lives of the peasants' (Dawut 2007: 153).

In a big city such as Ürümchi, men and women can be friends and meet in a relatively unrestricted manner. However, in the countryside casual encounters between persons of the opposite sex, unless they are married to each other or from the same family, is something rare. The life of women is centred

39 The Ordikhan Padishah Mazar is located in a remote place in the desert. Despite this, historically the *mazar* has attracted tens of thousands of pilgrims annually. This has been especially evident during the *mazar* festival, since during the rest of the year the area tends to be quite isolated (Dawut 2007: 152–3). For more information, see Gunnar Jarring: *The Ordam-Padishah System of Eastern Turkistan Shrines* (1935) and *Åter till Kashgar* (1979). Purportedly this is the resting-place of Ali Arslan Khan who was the grandson of the Uyghurs' first Muslim king, Satuq Bughra Khan (Dawut 2007: 150).

40 For a report on aspects of music, ritual and *mazars* see also Harris & Dawut 2002.

41 The festive atmosphere at the Ordam bears resemblance to shrine visitation in other parts of the Muslim world. Mernissi tells us that in Morocco young men go to the shrine in summer for picnics. Boys and girls dress up, old people go to pray, old and young generations intermingle. (Mernissi 1989: 112–14.)

on family duties often performed together with other women. However, at the annual *mazar* festivals people find a temporary break from day to day restrictions and from expectations on the gender issue. 'Arguably the festivals eliminate occupational, gender, age, and regional differences, and improve relationships between people of different regions, promoting unity, understanding and cultural exchange' (Dawut 2007: 153). Here we can discern how a broad term application of the well-known 'Turnerian' term *communitas* could be applied (Turner 1969: 131–65). The *mazar* festivals serve not only as places where a transformation of everyday routine takes place but also a place where one can envision a sense of temporary 'equality'.

### The *mazar* festivals and economy

Dawut highlights yet another characteristic of the *mazar* festivals, which also affects whole communities: economy. In many cases the *mazars* are, mostly due to inaccessibility, only frequented occasionally during the rest of the year. Therefore, the festivals serve as an appreciated break in daily routine and also as an opportunity to gain some extra money. (Dawut 2007: 153.) References from other parts of the Muslim world display similarities with the Uyghur *mazars*.

Literature on the subject shows that shrine complexes throughout the Islamic world may serve as, especially in rural areas, localized, communally run entities to which other religious institutions such as mosques, etc. are often attached. Pilgrimage to the sites brings with it then an impetus for religious communication and many times social and economic exchange (McChesney 1991, cited in Tyson 1997).

Furthermore, the specific local nature of the site acts to contribute to the creation or at least definition of communal identity and its concomitant boundaries (Tyson 1997: 2).

In some places, such as the Imam Asim Maziri in Khotan, which is a *mazar* situated on the edge of the Taklimakan Desert, the local government has seen the potential economic benefits of the *mazar* festivities. In 1993 the local government spent 480,000 Yuan, which were used for an eight kilometres long road leading from Jiya Township to the Imam Asim Maziri. Money was also allocated to construct a water tower at the site. Today an estimated 20,000

persons visit the festival each year (Dawut 2007: 154). A similar supportive attitude towards 'religious tourism' as in Khotan can be observed in the oasis-town of Qumul (Hami in Chinese) in eastern Xinjiang. When visiting the Qäys Ghojam Maziri<sup>42</sup> in the summer of 2008, I observed that there was extensive construction work going on close to the *mazar* entrance. The *shäykh* appeared to be, overall, positively supportive of this measure, which most possibly would make the shrine more accessible.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to the above-described supportive measures, the Ordam Padishah Mazar festival, which is the biggest shrine festival in Xinjiang, has been banned since the year 1997, which has led to the deterioration of the shrine. An ambiguous set of attitudes can be detected in this respect. Some local governments support shrine pilgrimage because of the economical benefits while others have closed local shrines due to the fear of rising religious extremism in the region (Dawut 2007: 154). Here we see that when it comes to shrine pilgrimage it is in some cases officially perceived as a feature of locally approved 'folk traditions' (Harris & Dawut 2002: 115) and thus allowed and even supported, as is the case with the Imam Asim Maziri festival. This situation of double standards is not limited to the festivals. In many parts of Xinjiang popular *mazars* such as Satuq Bughra Khan Maziri,<sup>44</sup> Apaq Khoja Maziri (Häzrät-i

42 Qäys Ghojam Maziri is located in the southwest part of the oasis town of Qumul. The local people simply call the shrine 'Ghojam Mazar'. This *mazar* is popular among both Uyghur and Hui pilgrims.

43 The Qäys Ghojam Maziri appears to be a part of the city of Qumul's tourist development strategy since it, together with the Altunluq (the tombs of the Uyghur kings), was included in a tourist guide provided at the hotel I was staying at 2008. As an attempt to illuminate the government's 'support' of Uyghur 'cultural life' some well chosen elements of Uyghur culture have been highlighted as national heritage (when they are not contradicting state policies). Among important historical Uyghur figures who have received official support can be mentioned Uyghur historic scholars such as Mahmud Kashgari (in Opal) and Yussup Khass Hajip (in Kashgar) and musicians such as Amannisakhan (in Yarkand) and even Islamic figures such as Apaq Khoja (in Kashgar). This attempt to support 'cultural tourism' can also be observed in Turpan (Imin Wang, the Mazar Aldi Village in Tuyuq, Qäys Ghojam Maziri and Altunluq in Qumul and so on). At these *mazars* it is nowadays often necessary to buy a ticket to get inside, a fee which often is set at a price which exceeds what the common pilgrim can afford (Dawut 2007: 157). For more information on the impact of religious tourism and mazars, see Dawut 2007.

44 Satuq Bughra Khan is portrayed as the first Uyghur King to accept Islam and subsequently make it into state religion. Jarring writes that that Satuq Bughra Khan was born in the year 944. His conversion took place when he was twelve years old (Jarring 1979: 133). See also Dawut 2001: 1–6.

Apaq),<sup>45</sup> Mahmud Kashgari Maziri,<sup>46</sup> Yusup Khass Hajip Maziri<sup>47</sup> and the *mazar* of Amannisakhan<sup>48</sup> have become the locus of the tourist industry. However, in other places in Xinjiang, visitation to *mazars* has been placed within the category of ‘dangerous’ religious practice and thus condemned (Harris & Dawut 2002: 115). Harris and Dawut have importantly pointed out that ‘the fate of the mazar tradition has rested to a certain extent on definitions’ (2002: 113). Referring to an article by Bellér-Hann (2001: 9), Harris and Dawut write about the ‘problematic nature of many popular ritual practices that fall between classification as “feudal superstition” and the politically neutral category of local “folk customs”’ in China (Harris & Dawut 2002: 113).

Official Chinese scholarship distinguishes some manifestations of local traditions (*örp-adät*) from religious practices. It defines the former as tolerable and even positive, since they contribute to the making of a colourful ethnic group within the People’s Republic of China (PRC), but denounces many religious practices as backward and negative, intimately connected to the legacy of feudalism which communism seeks to overcome (Bellér-Hann 2001: 9.)

- 45 Apağ Khoja’s real name was Hidayetulla Apağ Khoja and according to Jarring the name Apağ Khoja can be translated as ‘world emperor’ (Jarring 1979: 203). See also Dawut (2007) for a contemporary account. The Swedish scholar Gunnar Jarring writes that Apağ Khoja (d. 1694) was an administrative and religious leader and that Apağ Khoja was the first of the Sufi leaders commonly called *khojas* who ruled the region called Altä shähär (six cities). These cities included Kashgar, Yarkand, Kucha, Aqsu, Khotan and Uch Turpan.
- 46 Mahmud Kashgari is immortalized by his important contribution to world literature *Diwan Lughat et-Turk*, which is a compilation (dictionary) of Turkic dialects that he completed in the year 1077.
- 47 Yusup Khass Hajip is the eminent author of *Qutadgu Bilig* (‘The Wisdom of Felicity’) which is a didactic work written in verse (Soucek 2000: 92). Professor Äsäd Sulaiman has informed me that *Qutadgu Bilig* also can be understood as ‘The Wisdom of Royal Knowledge’ (personal communication 2009). See also Dawut 2001: 15–21.
- 48 The town of Yarkand is home to the tomb of Amannisakhan (1523–57), who is regarded as the mother of the Uyghur Twelve Muqam music tradition—a suite of music, which has been officially promoted as cultural legacy of the Uyghurs. She is enormously revered by the Uyghur people. The story goes that she was the daughter of a forester and was discovered by the second sultan of the Yarkand Dynasty, Sultan Abdureshid Khan (1533–60) when he was out hunting (Dawut 2001: 73). At this stage she was only thirteen years old. The Sultan fell in love with her singing and they got married. Unfortunately, Amannisa Khan died at young age when delivering a baby and only lived to be 34 years old (Harris & Muhpul 2002; Chun Shan 2006; see also Dawut 2001: 73; Haji 1990: 134).

Edmund Waite writes that starting in April 1996 with the ‘Strike Hard’ campaign the official attitude towards religion and religious movements in Xinjiang has become more observant than ever. The Strike Hard campaign was directed towards what was looked upon as ‘criminal and violent activity,’ where a direct connection could be observed between the fight against separatism in the area ‘which in turn was linked to unlawful religious activities’ (Waite 2007: 168, citing Dillon 2004).

The explanation given to these hard line policies has been the fight against Islamic violent groups that in Xinjiang are usually catch-termed *Wahhabi*.<sup>49</sup> Harris and Dawut (2002: 115) point out the irony in this, given that these religious groups strongly oppose pilgrimage to *mazars* as well as other religious practices that are commonly practiced by most Uyghur people. Thus there is good reason to question some of the local authorities’ knowledge of basic Uyghur religious practice (Harris & Dawut 2002: 115; Dawut 2007: 156). As Rahilä Dawut points out there is thus a ‘conflict between the government’s drive for eradicating “backwardness” and the desire to preserve and develop traditional practices as tourist resources’ (Dawut 2007: 161).

## Kuhmarim, Khotan

As mentioned earlier in this article, some *mazars* are visited all year, while others have fixed times of visitation. Such a *mazar* is Kuhmarim Maziri,<sup>50</sup> which is located in a scenic area on a mountainside overlooking the Qaraqash River. In late August 2009 I visited this *mazar*.<sup>51</sup> In Ürümqi a friend had

49 Following the tough policies of the Cultural Revolution a new liberal policy towards minorities was initiated in 1978. This meant more religious, linguistic and economic freedom for the minorities. In the case of Xinjiang the immediate result of this new policy was the opening of cross border trade, construction of mosques and production of literature and music. However, in the 1990s this liberal policy on the part of the government in Beijing was gradually abandoned (Waite 2007: 167–8). Following the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on 9/11 and America’s subsequent ‘War On Terror’ the Uyghur have been increasingly caught between official rhetoric and China’s own ‘war on terror’, and also in the Western media, where they have figured in the coverage of Guantanamo (Bellér-Hann 2007: 132).

50 Among the Western travellers writing on this shrine are F. Grenard, Aurel Stein and C. G. Mannerheim (Shinmen 2008). Kuhmarim Mazar has also been described in the works of contemporary Uyghur scholars. See Dawut 2001: 123 and Sulaiman 2006: 52.

51 Only two months had passed since the tragic outbreak of violence in Ürümqi on the 5th of July 2009. Initially I was going to attend a conference in Ürümqi organized by



Pilgrims leaving Kuhmarim Maziri. Photo © Patrick Hällzon 2009.

told me that it was time for *mazar säylisi* in the Khotan region, so I decided to go there. In Khotan I met up with a young Uyghur student who happened to have *mazars* as his special research topic. I could not have found a better guide.

It was early morning when my Uyghur friend and I set out in a taxi that would bring us to the vicinity of the *mazar*. We reached the banks of the Qaraqash River. This was in a sense also the starting point of our pilgrimage, since it was from here that we would proceed on foot. The sun beat down from above and it was very hot. We soon abandoned the coolness of the life-giving river and turned onto a dirt road, which apparently was leading to the *mazar*. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but sand, gravel and dry rocks surrounding us—not a person in sight. We walked on for what appeared to be quite a long period of time, but suddenly, out of the blue, a horse and carriage with pilgrims approached us, and then another. We halted a solitary coachman and asked him if he would bring us to the *mazar*. He agreed to do so for a symbolic exchange of money and we hopped on. The pilgrims come from villages all over the Khotan area visit the Kuhmarim *mazar* in July and

the Xinjiang University and Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. However, due to the tense situation in Ürümqi, the conference was cancelled. I was hesitant whether or not I should go, but finally decided to proceed with my journey.

August (personal communication 2009). The visits preferably take place on Thursdays.<sup>52</sup> Bruce G. Privratsky informs that within ‘Muslim societies Friday begins on Thursday evening, as in the Jewish Sabbath tradition’ (Privratsky 2001: 130).<sup>53</sup> ‘Cross-cultural patterns of Muslim piety suggest that the source of “Thursdayness” is the Sufi tradition that Thursday is a propitious day for visits to the shrines of saints’ (Privratsky 2001: 130).

Far in the distance the shrine gradually became visible. When we arrived we understood that we were not alone. We were greeted by the *shäykh* who was busy reciting the Qur’an. He agreed to read parts of the second Sura of the Qur’an, also called *bakarah*, for us. Besides the *shäykh* there were some women and children who had arrived—an *aqsaqal*<sup>54</sup> was reciting the Qur’an, too. Long sticks (*tugh*) adorned the shrine. On some of the *tugh* earlier pilgrims had attached rags and pieces of cloth while some of the other poles had been decorated with a stuffed sheep (*tulum*).<sup>55</sup> I observed some small stones piled up close to the tomb and was informed by my friend that the pilgrims leave these stones as *ex-votos*. They symbolize the pilgrim’s desire to conceive or have a stable family.<sup>56</sup> We took a look around the *mazar* complex, which, besides the tomb included a place of retreat called *etikapkhana*,<sup>57</sup> a mosque

- 52 Prof. Āsād Sulaiman has provided me with the interesting information that the preference for pilgrimage on Thursdays stems from local Islamic traditions where the pilgrims believe that Friday starts after lunchtime on Thursday. This originates in the common opinion that Friday is ended after the communal prayers have been performed.
- 53 In the book *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory*, Bruce G. Privratsky discusses the interesting concept of Thursdayness (*Kaz. peyshenbilik*) within the Kazakh religious tradition. Due to the limits of this article I will not elaborate on this further. For more information, see Privratsky 2001 and for a Uyghur perspective, see Bellér-Hann 2001.
- 54 *Aqsaqal* means an old ‘wise’ man. In the Uyghur language *aq* means white while *saqal* means beard, that is, white-beard. This is a common title given to elderly people who are to be treated with respect.
- 55 The sheep had been sacrificed and then stuffed with hay. This custom is a peculiarity for the Khotan area and is not found, for example, in Turpan or Qumul.
- 56 The desire to have a stable family is expressed by both male and female pilgrims. Uyghur friends have informed me that the pilgrims do not make vows in Khotan in the way they do in Turpan (personal communication 2009).
- 57 Devin DeWeese has informed me that the word *etikapkhana* ‘reflects the Arabic term *i’tikaf*, meaning seclusion or retreat; elsewhere it is more often called *khalvat-khana*, with the same meaning (personal communication 2010). It is a place of retreat for an assigned number of days. The pilgrim stays in this small building for at least three days to engage in the reading of the Qur’an and performance of the *zīkr*. The Swedish missionary David Gustafsson reports in the book *På Obanade Stigar* (1917) that ‘The





Tugh-Kuhmarim Maziri. Photo © Patrick Hällzon 2009.

which formerly was used as a *khaniqa*,<sup>58</sup> the *shäykh*'s personal dwellings and a rather big cave with a narrow entrance which is reached by climbing up a ladder.

The name Kuhmarim (Snake mountain) stems from two separate words, which both are of Persian origin. *Kuh* means mountain while *mar* means snake (Dawut 2001: 123). According to C. G. Mannerheim's accounts a person called Khaji Kohmeri<sup>59</sup> who was pursued by enemies managed to find refuge in a cave which opened miraculously for him. The entrance to the cave at this point was so 'narrow that it was only in the shape of a serpent that he managed to enter' (Mannerheim 1940: 113). Mannerheim writes that the black colour he observed in the ceiling may be explained by the enemies' attempts to smoke Khaji Kohmeri out of the cave. Another interesting passage

most recommended for those who wish to receive help from the saints is to stay at the saintly shrines for a period of forty days. This period is dedicated for the reading of the Qur'an and other devotions.' (Gustafsson 1917: 228, my translation.)

58 *Khaniqa* is a Sufi lodge. I have learned that nowadays the Sufis in Khotan rarely meet at these places for their gatherings but that they tend to meet in private homes instead. For a historic missionary description of rituals at a *Khaniqa*, see Högberg 1917b.

59 The spelling in the original text is Khadsji Kohmeri (Mannerheim 1940: 113).

in Mannerheim's account is that he states that the people believe that Khaji Kohmeri dwells in the cave and that he reveals himself to the pilgrims who pray hard enough Mannerheim (1940: 113). A parallel in this context is the scholar Xijuan Zhou who in an article reports on a visit to the Tuyuq Ghojam Maziri where the custodian of the *mazar* told her that if one only believes strongly enough, it is possible to see the faces of the 'sleepers' on the walls of the cave (Zhou 2008).

During the short period of time we had been at the Kuhmarim Maziri more and more pilgrims arrived. Outside the cave a number of women had gathered. Among them there was a *büwi* woman with whom we talked. She kindly agreed that they would sing some religious songs for us.

The *büwi* woman sat down with some other women and started by performing a *hekmät*. A *hekmät* is a recitation of *Dīvān-i-hikmat*, which is poetry that usually is attributed to the Sufi master Ahmad Yasavi.<sup>60</sup> After having recited the *hekmät* she proceeded with a *hālqä*. The *hālqä* is recitation of various kinds of poetry including *Dīvān-i-hikmat*, which are performed in different musical styles. Although it was the month of Ramadan when we visited the *mazar*, the *büwi* woman made an exception and sang the *mäwlut* for us. The *Mäwlut Näbi* is normally sung to celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*mäwlut*), which is celebrated on the twelfth day of the third month of the Islamic calendar (personal communication 2009).<sup>61</sup> The other women joined

60 This common approach has been challenged by Prof. Devin DeWeese who writes the following regarding 'the mystical poetry known as the *Dīvān-i-hikmat*. At best, it is wrongly put forth as the central literary monument of the Yasavi tradition, to the virtual exclusion, which in any case remains largely unexplored (here I would add that the ascription of the *Dīvān-i-hikmat* to Ahmad Yasavi is almost certainly wrong in any meaningful historical or literary sense.' (DeWeese 2000b: 371.) For a deep discussion regarding Ahmad Yasavi, see DeWeese 2006 and 2000b.

61 Among the Uyghur this month is also called *Räbiyäläwwäl eyi*. A contemporary report tells us that a main activity performed during this event is to gather money for charity (Rakhman, Hämdulla & Khoshtar 2008: 182–3). This is also confirmed in historical sources. In a critical Swedish missionary report from 1917, which deals with the *waqf* institution the missionary Gustaf Ahlbert expresses his personal opinion. He claims that the original purpose of the *waqf* has been lost and the only time when the money is set aside for something that seems to resemble the original thought which was charity and the expansion of the faith is once a year when the prophet's birthday is celebrated. At this event the revenue from the *waqf* is used for a big feast where the Qur'an is read for the assembled (Ahlbert 1917: 235). He describes the event in the following manner: 'The whole district's population, both rich and poor is present. All of them are served food. The rich get it on a plate while the poor are served their food on the corner of their coat. Besides this, the lecturers receive some money for their trouble.' (Ahlbert 1917: 234.)



Women who have gathered outside the cave at Kuhmarim Maziri. Note the *büwi* woman on the far right. Photo © Patrick Hällzon 2009.

her with their voices in what to me appeared to be a very advanced rhythmic-cooperation and at moments they got very emotional and started to weep. The ethno-musicologist Rachel Harris has written considerably on Uyghur music including ritual music. In the following description from a meeting consisting of Sufi men I find that the commonalities with the female gathering described above are striking.

The Uyghur Sufi lodges maintain a unique musical tradition in their large-scale *zīkr* rituals. The practice of *zīkr*, found amongst Sufis across Central Asia, Iran, and Turkey, refers to the recitation of the names of Allah and Islamic saints. . . The ritual song *hikmet* is sung in a free metered falsetto, with a plangent melody. As the names and deeds of the saints, in this tradition the founder of the lodge and the subsequent generations of his disciples, are recited, the men attending the ritual weep. (Harris & Muhpul 2002.)<sup>62</sup>

62 In Uyghur society there are certain forms of behaviour which are normally looked upon as feminine. One example is weeping. Men in Uyghur society are not supposed to cry openly howsoever difficult the problem might be. A man who cries is perceived as weak and crying is associated with female behaviour. However, at the *mazar* crying is perfectly permissible and sometimes even encouraged (personal

When we were about to leave the *mazar* quite a number of pilgrims—men, women and children—young and old had already arrived to the *mazar*. Some had arrived by foot while others used donkey carts, motorcycles and cars. It appeared to me that they were quite many. I was, however, informed that this was indeed a rather moderate number of visitors compared to earlier years and by no means anywhere near the amount of visitors reported from elsewhere.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

My point of departure has been to try to describe the *ziyarat* as an integral part of Muslim life in the region.

The *mazar* serves as an important reference point in the day-to-day life of the Uyghur people. Regardless of whether it is a local place of worship or a shrine that attracts pilgrims from a larger geographical area, it is a breathing space where one may escape the hardships of everyday life. At the *mazar* the people have a saint with whom they can identify and be inspired.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this paper the prevailing picture often painted in scholarship of *mazar* pilgrimage has been that of a specifically feminine practice with limited and/or minor significance to society as a whole. I argue that both of these suppositions are incorrect. Although it goes without saying that Uyghur society has strict gender roles which also include the religious sphere, I would like to question the simple dichotomous assumption of male religious life as being important to society while the female counterpart would be of unimportance.

In addition, to simply suppose that *mazar* pilgrimage is uninteresting for men since they participate in mosque centred activities is to miss out on crucial aspects of Uyghur and Central Asian Muslim religious life. While I do recognize that women's religious life (around the world) is often focused on healing and domestic issues, I reject the assumption that men would be totally disinterested in these aspects, or that it would be considered alien to Islam by the wider community. Some religious activities are centred in and around

communication 2008; Ürümchi Workshop 2008; Harris & Dawut 2002: 106; Arabov 2004: 346). Conversely, there are examples of female reversals of behaviour at the *mazar* (Zhou 2008; Harris & Dawut 2002: 112).

63 A possible explanation is that my visit took place during the month of Ramadan and it is fair to suggest that people would be less inclined to go on pilgrimage when fasting.

the mosque, while others are performed in the domestic domain or at the *mazar*. The exclusion of women in one area does not necessarily have to mean exclusion or disinterest of men in the other. As this article has demonstrated, the *mazar* is a venue in which both men and women participate—both as participants and as religious leaders. It would be to minimize Uyghur religious life if we were to accept the facile explanation of the wretched Muslim woman who, due to her expulsion from the mosque, resorts to the *mazar* to engage in ‘peripheral’ and/or ‘un-Islamic’ healing activities that are not condoned by the rest of the community.

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## This-Worldly and Other-Worldly

### A Holocaust pilgrimage

#### Pilgrims and the Holocaust

Częstochowa is a town known for a shrine to the Black Madonna and every year millions of pilgrims from all over the world come to this Virgin Mary town in south-west Poland. My story is about another kind of pilgrimage, which in a sense is connected to the course of events which occurred in Częstochowa on 22 September 1942. In the morning, the German Captain Degenhardt lined up around 8,000 Jews and commanded them to step either to the left or to the right. This efficient judge from the police force in Leipzig was rapid in his decisions and he thus settled the destinies of thousands of people.<sup>1</sup>

After the Polish Defensive War of 1939, the town (renamed Tschenschow) had been occupied by Nazi Germany, and incorporated into the General Government. The Nazis marched into Częstochowa on Sunday, 3 September 1939, two days after they invaded Poland. The next day, which became known as Bloody Monday, approximately 150 Jews were shot dead by the Germans. On 9 April 1941, a ghetto for Jews was created. During World War II about 45,000 of the Częstochowa Jews were killed by the Germans; almost the entire Jewish community living there. The late Swedish Professor of Oncology, Jerzy Einhorn (1925–2000), lived in the borderhouse Aleja 14, and heard of the terrible horrors; a ghastliness that was elucidated and concretized by all the stories told around him (Einhorn 2006: 186–9). Jerzy Einhorn survived the ghetto, but was detained at the Hasag-Palcery concentration camp between June 1943 and January 1945. In June 2009, his son Stefan made a bus tour between former camps, together with Jewish men and women, who were on this pilgrimage for a variety of reasons. The trip took place on 22–28 June 2009 and was named 'A journey in the tracks of the Holocaust'. The programme included

1 Captain Degenhardt had a Jewish mistress who was executed, to 'save' the Captain. 'The Germans, if caught having sexual relationships with Jewish women, could face a firing squad, accused of *Rassenschande* (race shame)' (Bender 1995: 81).

(Monday 22nd) Warsaw, with the Synagogue, burial grounds, the ghetto wall, and the Old Town; (Tuesday 23rd) Lodz Jewish Assembly, burial grounds, remnants of the Lodz ghetto, and the memorial monument; (Wednesday 24th) Warszawa Mila 18, Umschlagsplatz, and a bus journey to Treblinka, the extermination camp, staying over night in Lublin; (Thursday 25th) tour in Lublin, Majdanek, Kazimierz Dolny, overnight in Krakow; (Friday 26th) bus to Auschwitz, guided tour to Birkenau, guided tour to Auschwitz, Remu Krakow Synagogue, Shabat meal in Krakow; (Saturday 27th) guided tour in Krakow, visit to Kazimierz, the factory where *Schindler's List* was filmed, the pharmacy, and then Klezmer festival; (Sunday 28th) free day in Krakow, in the late afternoon the return trip to Sweden.

In his book *Pilgrimages and Literary Tradition* (2005), Philip Edwards pays attention to a novel by David Lodge, called *Therapy* (1995), in which the subject says: 'I'm not a true pilgrim, a true pilgrim being someone for whom it's an existential act of self-definition. . . a leap into the absurd, in Kierkegaard's sense' (Edwards 2005: 208). Further, Edwards discusses various pilgrims: 'the aesthetic' (basically on holiday), 'the ethical' (confirmed to everything that is expected of her/him), and 'the religious' (the true pilgrim in Kierkegaard's sense of religion). In this latter case, walking a thousand miles to the shrine of Santiago, without knowing whether anybody was ever buried there, is a Kierkegaardian leap: you choose to believe without rational compulsion—you make a leap into the void and in the process choose yourself.

Those on the Holocaust tour represented different 'pilgrim-modes.' My focus in this article is on two distinct differences when it comes to creed, or conceptions of the world: 'this-worldliness' and 'other-worldliness.' And for the pilgrims:

Whatever they might take in en route, their primary motivation is religious: to visit a site of special religious or numinous significance. By contrast, tourism is seen as either mere recreational activity, or at best as visiting beautiful buildings, landscapes, or works of art to evoke an aesthetic response to wonder. (Williamson 2005: 220.)

Maybe such distinctions are over-schematic, though, since 'sacral fulfilment' can be seen 'at work in all modern constructions of travel, including anthropology and tourism' (Williamson 2005: 220).

In the eyes of a Reconstructionist Jew, who has accepted the pantheistic God image of Mordecai Kaplan, God is revealed through Nature, so the wonders evoked by a fascinating tree, or a fantastic art museum, which involves

an aesthetic response, might be equal to the bewilderment that sacred sites arouse, the awe that links a wonder to the presence of divine power. The separation of religious and secular spheres is, in other words, not clear-cut when it comes to this Holocaust tour; the whole pilgrimage is therefore labelled as religious, and besides, several of the pilgrims have ideas about miracles. 'The gap between tourism and pilgrimage closes from two directions, because visitors . . . might visit with pious intent or at least with their credulity intact', and holy places are 'not merely a goal of sacred focus and intent, but also the appropriate locus for the display of votives and epiphanies, which might form the raw material for accounts of *mirabilia*' (Williamson 2005: 246).

Just as Judaism began as the nomadic religion of a group who carried the Ark of the Covenant with them as they travelled, so its later history has been a story of displacement from the Promised Land. The motifs of exile and return have become central to Jewish tradition, experience and identity. 'Return to the sacred centre is perceived as an act not merely of movement but also of restitution in moral and spiritual terms' (Coleman & Elsner 1995: 36). A pilgrimage like this offers an initiatory quality; the pilgrim is exposed to powerful *sacra* such as consecrated mass graves and holy *besoylem* (sanctified burial grounds), and therewith a guidance into the future. Sites and spaces of special and sacred significance are visited in a funereal atmosphere, with woeful expressions, and at the same time, the pilgrims are hopeful, as it all provides ways of including and celebrating a certain community; the pilgrimage suggests lines of association and alignment with ancestors and untold others. It provides an identity, and part of the liminal space and culture of pilgrimages is characterized by something merry.

'The pilgrims in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* mixed serious religious and spiritual intent with a great deal of play. . . tending towards an especially heightened form of excitability' (Franklin 2003: 124). A female participant of the Holocaust tour, my key-informant, gave evidence of excitement on several levels. Victor Turner's idea, that the pilgrimage is open and not conceptualized as religious routine, underlines the individual choice, and being 'liminoid' it tends 'to be generated by the voluntary activity of individuals during their free time' (Turner & Turner 1978: 231).<sup>2</sup> Since there were firmly established and

2 Liminality is a period of transition where normal limits of thought, self-understanding, and behaviour are relaxed—a situation, which can lead to new perspectives.

The sense of identity dissolves to some extent. Turner coined the term 'liminoid' for experiences that have characteristics of liminal ditto, but are optional. To someone sure about his Jewish identity, as a son of a survivor, a visit to a Holocaust museum might not involve a resolution of a personal crisis, it can instead be part of a scene in

deeply rooted Chassidic Orthodox Jews in the Swedish group, certain individuals never reverted from the liminoid to the liminal, but to some pilgrims, the places associated with holiness created something 'pseudo-liminal'. They went from voluntaristic processes to obligatory performances (cf. Turner & Turner 1978: 231–2).

The notion of pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon, which is productive of social encounters without hierarchical constraints, can be accepted and criticized at the same time. Simon Coleman and John Eade point this out in *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (2004). In this anthology, Coleman shows how members of a group '(who do admittedly have processional traditions of their own) are on a permanent search for means of personal and collective acceleration, and see such movement as the ultimate expression of an agency that must permeate all of life and not just time in church [cf. synagogue]' (Coleman 2004: 66).

The sacred travelling time is the whole bus tour from Sweden to Poland, with concentration camps and a Klezmer festival. In her ethnographic account of Rajasthani pilgrims, anthropologist Ann Grodzins Gold has shown that the highlight of the trip for most of the pilgrims was bathing in the Bay of Bengal, an act with no religious significance (Grodzins Gold 1988). In his book *From Pilgrimage to Package Tour* (2005) David Gladstone points out that, according to sociologist Erik Cohen, there are different tourist typologies, and the so called 'existential tourism' is most similar to the traditional religious pilgrimage, but this 'pilgrimage is not one from the mere periphery of a religious world toward its center; it is a journey from chaos into another cosmos, from meaninglessness to authentic existence' (Gladstone 2005: 6).

## Reasons and incentives for the Holocaust tour

Ann (b. 1960) was looking for some kind of excitement on the bus tour, and historical explanations in Poland. All the participants wanted to confront the horrible past. My other informant, Lennart (b. 1952), whose mother was interned in Auschwitz, went on the tour together with his brother Bernt. They both wanted to grasp something in themselves. Lennart is anxious about the situation in Sweden, where the Jews and Judaism are threatened because of assimilation. It is his 'duty' to be an Orthodox, Chassidic Jew, as he puts it.

his life-drama. That is, a liminoid experience. To somebody else, the visit can be the same as entering the realm of Purgatory, the situation is doubly liminal.

Appeals directed at ‘ordinary Jews’ to become ‘more Jewish’ as a memorial to the six million murdered by the Nazis have appeared from the US. ‘American Jewish communal activists transformed Europe’s Jews into the dwellers of “the shtetl”, a mythical imagined all-Jewish space where all-Jewish warmth, life, learning, and communal cohesion flourished’ (Diner 2009: 323). The Jews that were killed represented Jewish piety, intensity, and traditionalism, lived out in profoundly Jewish settlements. But in fact, many Jews had become highly secularized, and lived in cities, ‘and articulated complicated, and often tenuous, connections to their Jewishness’ (Diner 2009: 323). Across the ideological spectrum, leaders asserted that the Jews ‘had to compensate for what had been demolished. Only more Jewish knowledge, greater Jewish commitment, and deeper understanding of the destroyed world of European Jewry, they exhorted, could even begin to make up for the grievous losses.’ (Diner 2009: 323.)

For someone with killed relatives, to try to be ‘more Jewish’ is, of course, felt as ‘a duty’. Further, Lennart is not satisfied with a ‘soulless’ Judaism. He finds it vacuous. The liberal Conservative Judaism of Stockholm is dull and vapid, in his opinion.

The Conservative movement’s attempt at defining a role for itself in between Reform and Orthodoxy is today coming unstuck, and not entirely due to modern trends. It is often argued that the intellectual roots of the Conservative movement were basically incoherent, since it preserves a good deal of orthodox practice while rejecting the rationale for that practice. Being positioned in between Reform and Orthodoxy is not possible since there is no room between them. They see each other as the Other against which they define themselves, and Conservative Judaism tries to establish a form of religion out of the space between these two positions. (Leaman 2006: 138.)

Oliver Leaman sees Conservative Judaism as ‘sitting on the fence’, but in Stockholm it has been very successful, and appreciated by many Jews, in great part thanks to Chief Rabbi Morton Naware. The Great Synagogue in the city of Stockholm belongs to Masorti Judaism, the Conservative Movement. Naware questions religious fanaticism and finds extreme devotion peculiar. The idea that an older rabbi gives orders and the younger follower just obeys, is in his eyes somewhat odd. To Naware, unconditional submission is dangerous; a reluctance to question and to challenge does not make sense to him. The Lubavitch School in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, is too fundamental to be suit-

able for this broad-minded and open man (Narrowe 2005: 143). The Rabbi's wife Judi has a PhD in Social Anthropology, and has other goals than writing about cooking and flower arrangements, which is the advisable thing to do if you belong to Chabad and are of the female sex. In other words, this fantastic, creative, intelligent woman would have problems as a Chabad Lubavitch follower in Crown Heights (cf. Narrowe 2005: 246)! For Chassidic women, traditional marriage and motherhood are the only viable options. Lubavitch female priorities are clear:

[T]heir central mission is to create the best possible Jewish home. . .there is little place for the person who falls beyond basic assumptions about belief, desire, or personality. For many, a limited band of choices can offer a measure of safety, but for others, it walls off the only satisfying options. (Levine 2003: 204.)

Schools for boys and for girls in Crown Heights differ in curriculum and aim: females shall not study the Torah the way men do. 'Women would do well to focus their attention on the Aggadic aspects of the Torah as assembled in Ein Yaakov, since our Sages have noted the powerful impact of such study in cultivating one's spiritual emotions' (Touger 2010).<sup>3</sup> At an age when many young women feel insecure and lose confidence, Chabad 'Lubavitcher teen-aged girls maintain a strong sense of self and purpose. . . this may come from spending most of their time in the company of other girls and women, as well as the especially strong belief among Lubavitchers that each girl's everyday actions have cosmic potential to help bring the Messiah' (Fader 2009: 25).

The girls' curriculum is carefully chosen to avoid sexuality or contradictions with Lubavitch ideals. Women belonging to Chabad-Lubavitch strongly reject North American feminism. Since they have a higher purpose than secular women, Chabad girls repudiate their values. 'Several young women also mentioned the notion that females are innately on a higher spiritual plane than males, so they are better able to withstand the potential dangers of secular subjects.' (Levine 2003: 46.)

Stephanie Wellen Levine spent a year living in the Lubavitch community of Crown Heights, and my informant Ann has a close relative who has become a Chabad follower in the US, so she has been to several meetings at Chabad Houses. Ann, as well as Stephanie Wellen Levine, has gained an insight into

3 See Aggadah on page 135.



**Auschwitz I (the *Stammlager*) had a much higher standard than Auschwitz II-Birkenau. There were mainly Polish resistance fighters and Soviet prisoners of war in Auschwitz I. Despite their 'comfort', few survived more than some months. Photo © Jacob Kaluski 2009.**

the Lubavitch community. For someone with liberal ideals, the woman's role is abhorrent, and the view of women is discouraging. Therefore Ann happily belongs to the above mentioned version of Judaism, developed in Stockholm by Narrowe. Her grandparents came from the Baltic States. All through her life, Ann has heard different stories about Auschwitz, and now she wanted to see and experience the place for herself.

### **Looking for historical interpretations**

'One of the least appealing aspects of the Soviet analysis of Auschwitz, was the downplaying of the scale of the suffering endured by Jews in the camp' (Rees 2005: 329). In a study called 'Antifascist Pilgrimage and Rehabilitation at Auschwitz: the Political Tourism of *Aktion Sühnezeichen* and *Sozialistische Jugend*' (Huener 2001), the State Museum Oswiecim-Brzezinka (Auschwitz II-Birkenau) is examined, a site that since 1947 has been institutionalized as a charge of the Polish government. *Aktion Sühnezeichen* and *Sozialistische Jugend* were movements with idealistic young Germans who helped Poland to build up the State Museum at Auschwitz, but both groups neglected to assert in the narrative the specificity of crimes against European Jews at Auschwitz.





Auschwitz II-Birkenau—a true hell on earth. You had to choose in the morning—five minutes in the queue for the toilets or for breakfast. Photo © Jacob Kaluski 2009.

Their gesture and public pronouncements were directed towards ‘Poland’ and ‘the Polish people’; ‘as abstractions that may have implicitly included the remaining members of Poland’s decimated Jewish community, but did not designate European Jews in general, the broad category of deportees that composed the great majority of Auschwitz victims’ (Huener 2001: 526).

In his book *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz*, Jan Gross (2006) gives us an essay on historical interpretations. A year after the war ended, Jewish Holocaust survivors returning to their hometowns were harassed and persecuted. A *pogrom* took place in Kielce and anti-semitism was an obvious fact.

Thus, the new rulers’ neglect of the Holocaust of Polish Jewry, their putting the issue aside with other unmentionables, did not necessarily exemplify bad faith, but flowed naturally from the essence of the leading ideology and practicalities of the moment. That is why, also, in the Auschwitz museum, dedicated to the commemoration of the international anti-fascist struggle and martyrology, the word ‘Jew’ could hardly be found at all throughout the period of Communist rule in Poland. (Gross 2006: 243.)

Visits to the State Museum at Auschwitz I were for Polish schoolchildren a matter of recalling Polish political prisoners and Soviet POWs. The Jewishness of the victims at Auschwitz II-Birkenau was defused, 'victims were remembered as citizens of largely socialist republics first and foremost, and as Jews only secondarily' (Cole 1999: 100). In many ways, Majdanek would seem to have as much of a claim on memory as Auschwitz, but it was Auschwitz and not Majdanek that was chosen by the Polish government as the site for a state museum. Yes, the number of victims at Auschwitz outnumbered Majdanek, but there were other reasons involved as well: 'Majdanek faced eastward and while pointing to Soviet liberation, also pointed to a darker side of Polish-Soviet relations. Majdanek was liberated and then promptly made into a concentration camp for the Soviet secret police. Therefore, it was Auschwitz, not Majdanek, which became the symbol of fascist atrocity in post-war Poland.' (Cole 1999: 101.)

Were there more obscure strategies operating? According to Tim Cole, 'the Holocaust heritage industry' has produced an 'Auschwitz-land' for the present from the death camp of the past. Authentic relics, such as shoes, glasses, human hair and gas containers, have been taken from Birkenau and placed at Auschwitz. A mediated past is being served up, a contrived tourist attraction.

In many ways then, the 'tourist Auschwitz' is little more than a post-war Polish creation. However, the historical Auschwitz was not. But the danger is that in constructing a mythical 'Auschwitz', we distort the horrific reality of Auschwitz, and in its place create an 'Auschwitz' which is open to the attack of those who would deny that the Holocaust ever took place. Representing the complexities of the past in a ghoulish theme park for the present has consequences. The 'tourist Auschwitz' threatens to trivialise the past, domesticate the past, and ultimately jettison the past altogether. (Cole 1999: 110.)

The complex Auschwitz-Birkenau represents a great dilemma for interpretation. During operations, the camp consisted of three major parts and more than 40 sub-camps. The area was abandoned in 1944 by the Germans, who set part of it on fire, and blew up crematoria and gas chambers with dynamite. The Red Army burned down several of the barracks at Birkenau, and then local residents used remnants as building materials (Lennon & Foley 2007: 46-7). 'True international accord was not reached until 1977. . .the work of the International Auschwitz Committee (IAC) achieved the designation of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a World Cultural Heritage Site in 1973' (Lennon &

Foley 2007: 49). Well, a World Heritage site presents policy-makers and tourists with a dilemma, as John Lennon and Malcolm Foley have pointed out, and so does 'Schindler tourism'. The book *Schindler's Ark* by Thomas Keneally (1982) was filmed as *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg, which affected tourism immensely. The 'Schindler tour' was created in 1994–5, and for many tourists, the film sets located near Krakow were exciting. 'They were nearer, more contained and less time-consuming to visit than travelling to and re-viewing the real camps of Auschwitz I and Birkenau' (Lennon & Foley 2007: 64). The policy-makers, handling so called 'dark tourism', have to be careful, since partly distorted messages and poorly told stories, in combination with mute tourist brochures, say nothing about 'the political and historical preconditions that made the Holocaust possible' (Lennon & Foley 2007: 65).

The pilgrimage into the void is a parallel tour, in progress while the pilgrims over and over again confront well-groomed ghastliness. The construction of memory in memorials is shown when Holocaust monuments are examined. They 'reflect particular kinds of political and cultural knowledge even as they determine the understanding future generations will have of this time' (Young 1988: 173). James Young has tried to examine the activity of Holocaust memorialisation and the ways in which viewers respond. The rep-



Gas chamber in Majdanek death camp. The walls were coloured blue from cyanide. When the chamber was full, small children and infants were thrown over the heads of those standing, to keep a high efficiency. Photo © Jacob Kaluski 2009.



Anything of economic value was taken care of. Prostheses were collected and sorted for potential sale or use among those who 'served their cause'. Photo © Jacob Kaluski 2009.

representations (memorials, museums, monuments etc.) transform the memory, and affect the Holocaust narratives. The memorial camps collapse the distinction between themselves and what they evoke, 'their significance derives both from the knowledge we bring to them and from their explanatory inscriptions' (Young 1988: 175). The pilgrimage of the Swedish Jews in Poland meant a different kind of voidness to different individuals: some of the pilgrims had deep historical knowledge, and were familiar with political and cultural circumstances, other pilgrims were in the dark about those matters. Irrespective of a frame of reference, to grasp the messages of memorial sites, places that call to mind what relatives went through when the Final Solution became a primary goal of the war for the Nazis in 1941, is horror *per se*.

Liora Gubkin's book *You Shall Tell Your Children: Holocaust memory in American Passover ritual* begins: 'Be very, very careful, for we are prone to forgetting fast' (Gubkin 2007: 1). A pilgrimage in the void of 'history-less-ness' can appear in the form of new ideas, while memorials pass by or penetrate the memory storage of the pilgrim. The challenge of Holocaust memory is enormous. We can see the Holocaust as 'Otherworld':

[T]he word 'Auschwitz' often serves as metonym, representing the whole of the destruction of the Jews during the Shoah. Auschwitz is a significant icon for the experience of the concentration camps and the evil acts committed in them. . . The ruins of Auschwitz reside in Poland; 'Auschwitz' as



Shoes exhibited in Auschwitz I. The greater part came from Auschwitz II-Birkenau.  
Photo © Jacob Kaluski 2009.

icon for the horrors of the Holocaust resides at the limits of our experience. (Gubkin 2007: 14.)

The pilgrims were confronted with stimuli that made thoughts take on an active, embodied quality. ‘Ultimately, however, the subject remains the facilitator of her own experience; she must actively engage her imagination, set the “stage” for the idea to have impact. The subject’s experience is the site for transformative knowledge’ (Gubkin 2007: 15).

When it comes to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and ‘ghetto heroes’, as a place name in Polish town quarters, we can see that the unique fate of the Jews, the Holocaust, did not find expression in the Polish landscape. A significant part of contemporary Polish society believes that Polish and Jewish sufferings during World War II were similar and comparable.

Thus, although there are Ghetto Heroes squares in many Polish towns, there are no Holocaust Victims squares. This seems to be a case of the heroization of death. The death of the Ghetto fighters accorded well with the Polish historical paradigm of glorifying those who died in a hopeless fight. It was therefore much more easily assimilated into the Polish mental landscape and subsequently into the landscape of Polish towns than the tragedy of the Holocaust. Moreover, the focus on the heroization of death equalized, consciously or not, the situation of the Jews and the Poles: the latter had many heroic fighters too. (Kapralski 2001: 47–8.)



Crematoria in Auschwitz I. In November 1944, Heinrich Himmler ordered the crematoria in Auschwitz II-Birkenau to be destroyed before the Red Army would reach the camp. Photo © Jacob Kaluski 2009.

To be Jewish in a secular world is a condition of wakefulness, of perpetual motion and interrogation of God, the world, and above all oneself. Even a Jew must become Jewish, and when I heard Lennart talk about Judaism, I realized that he is engaged in the process of becoming ‘more Jewish’. His mother survived Auschwitz. ‘The Jews in Poland dwindled from 3,300,000 to about 5,000’ (Cohn-Sherbok 2003: 321). The horror of the atrocities, so pedantically recorded by German bureaucratic efficiency in tons of captured paperwork, engages scholars and survivors, psychoanalysts and pedagogues, to such an extent that myriads of books proliferate alongside the newest accretions to collective memory: memorials and museums. A veritable new scholarly industry has arisen, derisively called ‘*shoa* business’, which threatens to trivialize the special nature of what has come to be known as Holocaust Studies (Bowman 1997: 211–15). But to the Jews on the bus tour in June 2009, on a pilgrimage into the void, the ‘special nature’ was clear, and my informants had at least one thing in common with Kierkegaard: they understood that the truth is not something we know, but something we are, or are in the process of becoming. Contemporary Judaism is by no means homogeneous in its approach to the world and the place of Jews within it. Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist branches seek to negotiate a range of compromises between the traditions of Judaism and the demands of a modern, secu-

lar world. The persistence of conflicting ideas within the main movements of Judaism, about what happens to the body and soul in the afterlife, shapes popular Jewish understanding of the integrity of the body and what entails a proper burial. Of course, the spectrum of Jewish responses to the afterlife affects how the living continues to relate to the deceased. In this way, beliefs about the afterlife and rites of death and mourning are clearly intertwined (Golbert 2006: 49–52).

My studies of Jewish pilgrimages in Central Asia organised by Chabad-Lubavitch, have shown that the recitation of the Kaddish is particularly significant. The Kaddish prayer is probably the most important single ritual around burial grounds. It is the most frequently and deeply experienced aspect of Jewish custom for pilgrims at concentration camps; the most ethnically rooted moment, sweeping together all the individuals present, connecting them with earlier parts of self, with each other, and with Jews who had lived and died before. Anita Diamant writes about the power of the Kaddish prayer in terms both of the meaning of its words and the repetition of its sounds. ‘The mystery of Kaddish is revealed every time it is spoken aloud with others. The truth is that the sounds of the words are more important than their definitions. The text is secondary to the emotional experience of its recitation. The meaning only come clear when given communal voice.’ (Diamant 1998: 14.)

## Memories of the Holocaust

Richard Rubenstein published his *After Auschwitz* in 1966 and created a great interest in the Holocaust. Starvation of ‘useless mouths’ was practiced in Poland, before the extermination centre at Chelmno was ready. Starvation was the method of murdering preferred by German bureaucrats. ‘At Auschwitz, which became the largest killing center, the magnitude of death was the equivalent of one death per minute, day and night, for a period of three years’ (Rubenstein & Roth 1987: 147). To many, surviving was a miracle, and prayers together with Jewish tales helped them to go on. The anecdotes, parables, legends, philosophy and so on, that explain or illustrate points of the Jewish law is called *The Aggadah*; some call it storytelling, others ‘theological narration’, since it comprises biblical tales and rabbinical midrashic elaborations of biblical stories. With its more popular emphasis on miracles and legends, it is not, however, a basis for *halachic* judgements.

The Shoah is to be distinguished from traditional Christian anti-semitism by virtue of its transcendence and inversion of all ethical and mediating norms.

The Nazi racial imperative that *all* Jews must die, and that they must die here and now, has no Christian precedent (Katz 1994: 580).

Today, we can see *Shoah's* memories as *Aggadah*, according to Rabbi Peter Knobel, who belongs to the Union for Reform Judaism.<sup>4</sup> The *Aggadah* was of great importance to many survivors, since they found existential and psychological truth in the ancient mythic hyperbole of the rabbis. Jeremy Popkin has studied first-person narratives and the memory of the Holocaust, and he suggests 'that historians need to re-examine the question of whether the Holocaust experience necessarily strengthened a survivor's sense of Jewish identity and convinced those who lived through it that assimilation was an impossible life strategy' (Popkin 2003: 78). Conflicted attitudes about Jewish identity or a sense of not belonging wholly to any group are a common theme in these memoirs. Ann had the same feeling after the pilgrimage, a bit of an outsider, now being particularly conscious about collective memories, and therefore trying hard to find her context in the Jewish tradition. Lennart has solved this problem through becoming a Chassidic, Orthodox Jew. This gives him a strong sense of belonging. According to Emil Fackenheim, Jews have to find an authentic Jewish future, whether religious or secular. 'The *Tikkun* which for the post Holocaust Jew is a moral necessity is a possibility because during the Holocaust itself *Tikkun* was already actual' (Fackenheim 1999: 392). It is all about mending the world; there is a Jewish future with a recovered tradition—for the religious Jew, the Word of God, for the secular Jew, the word of man and his 'divine spark' (Fackenheim 1999: 393). Every act of human good, like the performance of *mitzvot*, restores and perfects the broken universe, in a process called *tikkun* ('rectification'). Thus the classic Jewish process of turning from sin to righteousness, *teshuvah*, is as critical for the universe as it is for the human relationship with God.

Fackenheim was a leader of the existentialist revolt against the rationalist establishment of liberal Jewish theology. Nevertheless, he conceded that Elie Wiesel and Richard Rubenstein were right: God was not present in the Holocaust. But what do we mean by 'Holocaust'? Fackenheim identifies two factors in the Holocaust that newly transform the old problem of suffering. In previous persecutions, Jews could often save their lives by conversion; but the Nazis condemned the Jews because of their biology. Being itself was made a capital crime and there was nothing one could do about it. Thus, the Nazis knew the evil they were doing. They were educated people whose moral consciousness was shaped by a Christian culture, yet they routinely proceeded to

4 <http://www.bethemet.org/Highlights/Sermons/PSKYK5767.pdf>.



process the mass murder of Jews. During the last stages of the war, the hatred of Jews transcended the drive to self-preservation. After the war, Fackenheim no longer found it useful to distinguish between religious and secular Jews. Any Jew, regardless of label, who helps preserve and maintain or, better, enriches the life of the Jewish people fulfils the supreme Jewish responsibility of our time (cf. Fackenheim 1999: 388–95).

## Jewish identity

In recovering a Jewish identity in depth, many found themselves on new terms with Hashem, the Name/Godhead. A sizeable minority within the Jewish community is now involved in exploring the dimensions of their personal relationships with God. Through mysticism or the study of texts, in liturgy or Jewish activism, many Jews are seeking to draw closer to what they sense is the still living God of the universe. In Lennart's opinion, it is more about a feeling than theological knowledge. Judaism to him and to many of his Jewish friends mostly concerns rituals. A Chassidic branch as Chabad-Lubavitch



Auschwitz I—a popular tourist sight not far from Krakow. Since the museum site combines elements from Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau, it can be difficult for the visitors to comprehend what is preserved, and what is moved and restored. Photo © Jacob Kaluski 2009.

brings about Jewish tradition and Jewishness in a plain and clear way, it makes Judaism visible and perceivable, and therefore it is attractive.

The children of the survivors, living in Sweden today, want to assert a positive Jewish identity, as practising or secular, as consciously living individuals adding creative input, as Jews, to society as a whole. To Lennart, the rituals of Chabad-Lubavitch are helpful. He fears ideas like those by which the remembered presence of Jews and Jewish space can become a symbol of the past. Therefore, to be active and support the publishing of new educational material about Jews, Jewish culture, and Jewish history is of importance. It helps the next generation to stay Jewish in the secular Swedish society. Jewish organizations are trying to develop strategies to secure that there is actual living input. But in many cases, there is a problem of representation. As Ruth Ellen Gruber puts it:

There is a difference between official, established Judaism and how Jews actually live. And there is an imagined Judaism, created *ex nihilo*. How do we Jews represent Jewish culture in relation to ourselves, to non-Jews, in the media? Should we participate or stand by? . . . Representation is a moving target. Jewish culture is undergoing such changes that to pin it down to one representation is an illusion. (Gruber 2002: 238–9.)

### ***Rituals***

Altogether—the pilgrimage in Poland, the lifestyle in Sweden—it all comes to rituals. The social dramas mirroring controversies fomenting in the group psyche, that Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner have discussed, are always of interest when it comes to rituals. They constitute a norm for actions. This imaginative force for action implies that the past can be read as the exclusive source of the present, when connected to traditionalism. To experience the real meaning of being part of a continuing tradition is important to Lennart. He is alive to the fact that ‘tradition describes the body of representations, images, theoretical and practical intelligence, behavior, attitudes and so on that a group or society accepts in the name of the *necessary* continuity between the past and the present’ (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 87). What comes from the past is only constituted as tradition when the old has authority in the present, but rituals are here as becomings all the time. Lennart says:

I know most of all the important rituals and can even function as *chazan*<sup>5</sup> in the synagogue. But, honestly, I am not sure that I fully understand what I sing or read, but it is not so important, it is the feeling of belonging that matters, and the whirl of happiness that I experience. (Lennart, August 4, 2009.)

Religious worship to Lennart is an action such as lighting the Chanukah *menorah* in December, doing things in a Jewish way; and in the different rituals there is space for a homage to his mother, who suffered in Auschwitz during the war.

The Chanukah menorah can, and does, bring many Jews back to their Jewish roots. . . Chanukah commemorates the revolt, in 165 BCE, of a small band of Jewish warriors led by Judah the Maccabee against the powerful Syrian-Greek occupiers of ancient Israel. . . the Jews recaptured their Temple and tried to light the menorah inside but found just one day's supply of sanctified oil. Miraculously, the Temple oil burned for eight days, long enough for more oil to be produced. (Fishkoff 2003: 287.)

On the third eve of Chanukah 2007/5768, the Chabad Rebbe of Stockholm, Chaim Greisman, lighted Chanukah candles with Nobel Prize laureates in the park Kungsträdgården, in Stockholm city. It was a success to all present. The lightning of large, outdoor *menorahs* in cities around the world, often filmed and telecasted, is part of Chabad's outreach efforts. 'These efforts not only transform a private, domestic ritual into a large-scale, public spectacle with universal implications; they also establish acts of publicizing the miracle of Hanukkah as integral to the miracle itself, essential to realizing its spiritual significance' (Shandler 2009: 243).

Lennart draws attention to what *Jerusalem Post* journalist Sue Fishkoff has written: 'The Lubavitcher Rebbe said that by going beyond our nature and reaching out to someone else, we can bring about a transformation of the entire world' (Fishkoff 2003: 299–300). Religion is about generosity, on many different levels. And *tikkun* is the present scheme of creation, which is intended to rectify the spiritual damage that occurred when the world of *tohu* (the original scheme of creation) ended. To be generous is a way to mend the world. *Tikkun* refers to the elaborate activity of mending the cosmic flaws brought about by the intra-divine rupture known as the 'breaking of the ves-

5 A Jewish cantor who helps lead the congregation in songful prayer.

sels,' as well as by human sin. But performances of intricate contemplative and theurgic rites are not feasible to most Jews of today. A Chassidic Jew, with a family and full time job, tries to find plausible ways, since *tikkun* is a central concept in the history of *kabbalah*: 'It signifies both the positive function that man fulfills generally when he serves God, and also the purpose of prayer in particular' (Tishby 1995: 362). The worshipper and the physical world can both be restored by human prayer.

The first *tikkun* is the restoration of oneself, self-perfection; the second *tikkun* is the restoration of this world; the third *tikkun* is the restoration of the world above throughout all the hosts of heaven; the fourth *tikkun* is the restoration of the holy name through the mystery of the holy chariots, and the mystery of all the worlds above and below with the proper kind of restoration (Tishby 1995: 362).

The *tikkunim* (restorations) during the process of unification open the supernal source of influence and cause it to flow down from one level to the next. This inflow spreads bliss and satisfaction, and the followers of Rebbe Greisman in Stockholm feel good about their belonging, without having the theoretical insights that he has. In the rituals they get his knowledge served in a comprehensible way. Chabad-Lubavitch is to a high degree about *shechinah* ('indwelling'), the divine power that is present in everything. 'The Godly "energy" that fills the universe, giving life and existence to each created being in accordance with its particular characteristics. . . The *Shekhinah* [= *shechinah*] is also called Knesset Israel ("the community of Israel") because it is the collective source of the souls of the Jewish people.' (Steinsaltz 2007: 322.)

All Jews who suffer shall see affliction and torment as more than personal; problems shall be placed 'within the context of the entire Jewish people, as a representation of the *Shekhinah*, the presence of God. . . This idea is expressed in almost every Jewish prayer, keeping prayer from remaining solely on the individual level.' (Steinsaltz 2007: 36.) This is religion to Lennart, the feeling of togetherness, and Adin Steinsaltz is an important person in Lennart's life. 'We take the problem out of its private context and instead intercede on behalf of the individual as a part of the Jewish people' (Steinsaltz 2007: 36). In Isaak Luria's view, the most fundamental and ultimate goal of all human existence is *tikkun*. The liberation of divine light in all of its forms, from its entrapment in the material sphere, its return to its source on high, and the ascent of all the worlds to their elaborate and painstaking regimen of contemplative devo-

tion. This reparation was conceived by Luria as synonymous with messianic redemption. (Fine 2003: 144.)

### ***Messianic ideas***

The great Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–94) was proclaimed as the Messiah by many Chabadniks. In 1998 the Central Committee of Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbis issued a statement denouncing this kind of messianism:

Belief in the coming of the Moshiach and awaiting his imminent arrival is a basic tenet of the Jewish faith. It is clear, however, that conjecture as to the possible identity of Moshiach is not part of the basic tenet of Judaism . . . The preoccupation with identifying the Rebbe as Moshiach is clearly contrary to the Rebbe's wishes. (Fishkoff 2003: 268–9.)

Orthodox rabbi and professor David Berger published *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* in 2001. Berger argues that the assertion a person could begin a messianic mission, die, and posthumously return to complete his mission has been unanimously rejected by the Sages and Jewish polemicists for nearly 2,000 years. The 'dominant institutions of the Lubavitch movement are either overtly messianist or unwilling to declare unequivocally that the Rebbe is not the Messiah' (Berger 2008: 92). Conservative Judaism, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism all have messianic ideas in their theologies, but the liberal Jews belonging to those branches never talk about the arrival of a flesh-and-blood saviour. According to Chabad, though, *be'as ha'Moshiach*, the coming of Messiah, is a foundation stone. Even though, as Gershom Scholem pointed out, there was a neutralization of messianism in early Chassidism (Scholem 1971: 176–202).

To an analytic person such as Lennart, messianic ideas are not so attractive. Swedish followers agree with Fishkoff when she asks: 'Why didn't Schneerson himself put a stop to Chabad messianism?' In the US, many left the movement because of the Messiah proclamation.

But Lubavitch spokesman Zalman Shmotkin says that after March 1992, Schneerson had expressive aphasia and was physically unable to communicate his needs and wishes. . . Any statements issued in the Rebbe's name during the final two years of his life were filtered through his closest aides, themselves divided as to how far they believed and were willing to push his messianic status. (Fishkoff 2003: 266.)

To the pilgrim Lennart, Chabad-Lubavitch is a way of being Jewish, it is a communion that strengthens his ties with his dead relatives, and with family and Jewish friends all over the world. Chabad-Lubavitch in the United States sends emissaries to all corners of the globe, and 'in particular has provided religious guidance and facilities to Jews in countries of oppression and persecution. More so than any other ultra-Orthodox group, Habad Hasidism [Chabad Chassidism] has learned how to utilize the advantages of a prosperous society and the tools of modern technology for the dissemination of its teachings.' (Ravitzky 1996: 181–2.)

Several members of liberal Conservative Judaism are not so happy about the spreading of Chabad and the fact that it is found all over the world. To some of the pilgrims, this is 'tricky'. Aviezer Ravitzky formulates it for them:

[O]n the one hand, Habad Hasidism adheres to a consistent, radically conservative posture regarding matters of faith and religious norms: it clearly rejects such concepts as liberalism, pluralism, and universal human equality; it condemns any trace of modern epistemological skepticism; and it openly advocates fundamentalist positions on questions relating to religion and science. On the other hand, more than any other trend in contemporary Haredi Jewry, it displays a dynamic and activist attitude, approaching reality as a field of movement and change, consciously expanding the boundaries of its religious involvement. (Ravitzky 1996: 183.)

But unlike many critical Conservative Jews, Ravitzky is fascinated by the Chabad movement. When he wrote about them in 1996, it was hard to tell in what direction the Lubavitch Chassidic movement would go. Still, Ravitzky pointed out that the concrete messianism and the intense personal dependence probably would disappear. According to the followers that I have talked to, belonging to the Swedish branch, he was right about that, and the interesting feature emphasized in the analysis is that the far-reaching acosmic conception inherent in traditional theology and ideology, in fact, suits secularized Jews of today who search for 'more Jewishness'. Chabad rejects a dichotomy between sacred and profane; divine immanence is present everywhere, and all of being is conceived as an arena for the service of God (cf. Ravitzky 1996: 184).

## Dichotomy constructed

A dual focus, alternating between two pilgrimages with different approaches, with two different branches of Judaism behind them, makes my informants placeholders. They are defined by their groups rather than being presented as characters, whose ideas constitute unconnected subjects. The dual focus depends heavily on a distinction between those who are within and those who are without. But ‘insider/outsider’ changes depending on the focus of attention. Rituals that celebrate inclusion are of importance in Jewish life, and the risk of exclusion is high. I am shifting between Orthodox Lennart and Conservative Ann in the text, since a dual focus system disregards cause-and-effect connections.

Occasionally, the informants operate as representatives of a group or category rather than as independent individuals. Tradition and other established systems are therefore very important. Chabad and Orthodox Chassidism is depicted as one group, and the other group painted is liberal Conservative Judaism: Lennart and Ann. Causation is not central, ‘[f]or we understand that the past not only molds the present, but at the same time, the present sculpts the past’ (Markle 1995: 136).

The Holocaust has different connotations for the two individuals; neither of Ann’s parents was interned, but nevertheless, the Holocaust, this specific large-scale human destruction, is part of Ann’s life in many ways.

Until a phenomenon has a commonly agreed upon name, it lacks a certain cognitive reality. The way in which we define a subject and identify it determines, at least in part, the way that we think of it, its meaning for us. With a name, we gain an identity, a certain clarity; but as boundary, the name also excludes as foreign that which is on the other side. (Markle 1995: 137.)

### *Holocaust memorabilia*

For pilgrims, souvenirs are important and the Holocaust is an object of unfinished mourning for all Jews. Hana Greenfield, who was in Terezin, Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen, says in her *Fragments of Memory* that ‘[w]hen visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau some years ago, three survivors crawled inside the gas chambers, as macabre as it may sound, to scrape out some ashes to take home with them’ (Greenfield 1998: 93). Gerald Markle has also pointed out the same phenomenon when it comes to Auschwitz: ‘These visitors have not left the site untouched. The pile of inmate shoes and the mound of women’s hair are

considerably smaller now than they were a few years ago. One presumes that tourists, for whatever reasons, treat objects as memorabilia (or icons?) and take them home.' (Markle 1995: 1.)

Unlike souvenirs, memorabilia are valued for their connection to a historical event. Holocaust memorabilia covers documents from the ghettos and camps, and are today sold on the Internet. To Ann, Nechama Tec's *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (2008) became a special choice. She picked up the book at the Galicia Jewish Museum, located in Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter of Krakow. After the tour to concentration camps, a book that describes the hero Tuvia Bielski, who rescued more than a thousand of his fellow Jews from the Holocaust, was breathtaking and more than 'a book'. It was *the* antithesis, not just an extraordinary feat worth recording, but something unbelievable, and in a way spiritual—a carrier of memorabilia. Not to be compared to amulets, *kame'a*, which are supposed to be 'peculiarly potent objects'. The Biblical Hebrews were well acquainted with their merits. [Nothing of value for a matter-of-fact person as Ann, though.] Their use was very extensive in the Talmudic period, and was even accepted by certain rabbinic authorities (Trachtenberg 2004: 132.)

Two ritual objects of ambiguous character, the *phylacteries* and the *mezuzot*, have played a part in superstitious usage as well as in religious. The phylacteries were popularly believed to drive off demons, but the effect of religious teaching and custom made for a triumph of religion over superstition. They lost their meaning as 'anti-demonic', and when someone says that the *tefillin* wards off the unwelcome ministrations of Satan, the sense is figurative. The *mezuzah*, on the contrary, retained its original significance as an amulet despite rabbinic efforts to make it an exclusively religious symbol. Originally a primitive charm, affixed to the door-post to keep demons out of the house, the rabbinic leaders literally gave it a religious content in the shape of a strip of parchment inscribed with 'Shema' and 'Ve-haja im shamoain' (from Deut. 6 and 11) in the hope that it might develop into a constant reminder of the principle of monotheism, so instead of prohibiting the charm, the religious leaders re-interpreted it (cf. Trachtenberg 2004: 145–6). Holocaust museums sell *mezuzot*, but it would be hard to classify them as souvenirs, even though they are special keepsakes. They are part of a pilgrimage between former concentration camps, and remind Jewish visitors of their heritage.

A pilgrimage can be a collective affirmation of values and the journey is both physical and psychological. In fact, visiting sites which are connected to death, have become a significant part of tourist experiences in many societies. A death site which is part of a stop on a coach tour itinerary is as important



to the individual as a trip to a remote shrine, but maybe physically somewhat more convenient. Clearly, 'some death sites have become the locations (or, even, excuses) for service industries supplying conveniently-spaced watering-holes, lavatories and retail outlets designed to intervene in the journeys made by visitors through our heritage sites and landscapes' (Lennon & Foley 2007: 5).

Lennart with his 'enjoying-every-precious-moment-here-and-now' attitude only buys costly and valuable keepsakes, and nothing sumptuous was on offer during the pilgrimage, so he bought nothing.

### **Orthodox Judaism**

My female informant, Ann, is a representative of modern, liberal Conservative Judaism. Lennart represents Orthodox Judaism and the *baal teshuvah* phenomenon. The people making this sweeping change in their lives grew up in a secular world. They went to good colleges and got excellent jobs. They did not become Orthodox because they were afraid, or because they needed a militaristic set of commands for living their lives. They chose Orthodoxy because it satisfied their need for intellectual stimulation and emotional security.

[D]espite his learning, [*baal teshuvah*/B.T.] is often still ignorant and unsure of the reasons for everything he does. . . The newly-religious B.T. is unable to distinguish between Law (*halachah*), custom (*minhag*), and stringency (*chumrah*); being as fearful as he is of the slightest transgression, he simply emulates his mentors or takes upon himself the most extreme stringencies. (Bauer 1991: 16–17.)

Chabad followers in certain countries are told that an intellectual and ideological equality exists between the genders in Chabad-Lubavitch, which, however, seems to be a myth. As already mentioned, but worth underlining: in the religious schools, boys and girls study different subjects. 'Women were encouraged to study certain Jewish texts, especially those essential to the keeping of Jewish tradition, but they were discouraged from studying the Talmud and philosophical/theological texts, in accordance with traditional Orthodox culture' (Ehrlich 2004: 200).

Women study practical or inspirational literature, not *halachah* as the men do. They learn the observances necessary for their roles as homemakers and mothers (family purity and *kashrut*).

Even women employed outside the home in outreach functions did not have extensive authority within the movement, and were limited to pub-

lishing cookbooks and magazines for women, with spiritually uplifting stories and advice on how to raise children. This is a reflection of the prevalent view in Habad [Chabad] of the essential difference between men and women. (Ehrlich 2004: 200.)

To this day, in almost all right-wing Orthodox schools women are not taught the Talmud because of the Talmudic injunction (*Mishnah Sota* 3:4), that liken teaching a woman Torah to teaching her frivolity, since women are known to be light-headed! And, in fact, not until 1984 were women belonging to Conservative Judaism given the full right to receive *aliyot* and read from the Torah.

### ***Conservative Judaism, Maimonides, and back to Chassidism***

When Conservative Judaism confronted feminism in the 1970s, the movement realized that crisis represents both danger and opportunity. Then the question about the ordination of women threatened to overthrow the carefully constructed structures of Jewish communal life. It represented anarchy. The ordination issue meant a breaking with the past, and in the early stages, many men fervently prayed that the issue would simply go away. But it did not. Instead, the calls for action grew stronger and louder. A commission was formed between 1977 and 1979, and it was required to make a decision. The report dealt at length with the *halachic* dimensions and the commission came to the conclusion that there is no direct *halachic* objection to the acts of training and ordaining a woman to be a rabbi, preacher and teacher in Israel. It was agreed that a decision not to ordain women would mean the rejection of a pool of talented, committed, and energetic women who could play a major role in revitalizing Jewish tradition and values within the Conservative Movement. For four years the issue lay dormant; in 1983, at the Dallas convention, the debate was long and bitter. It was inevitable that sooner or later a woman ordained at the Reform or Reconstructionist school would apply for membership in the Assembly. At the end of 1983 the Seminary faculty voted 'yes' and in 1985, Conservative Judaism had its first woman rabbi (cf. Gillman 1993: 124–36). Gerson Cohen is a very important man for Conservative Judaism, also in Stockholm. Morton Narowe emphasizes in his Swedish memoirs, that Cohen was an excellent teacher, and very open minded, in a straightforward critical way (Narowe 2005: 90–1).

In my constructed dichotomy between Ann and Lennart, that is, liberal Conservative Judaism and Chassidic Orthodoxy, I now turn to Moses Maimonides (1135/8–1204). In his times, it was also a matter of confronting

new challenges by compiling a code of Jewish law, but then it was more a matter of creating something that would make Jews independent of any central institution or rabbinic authority.

Maimonides wrote a *Guide for the Perplexed* so that Jewish philosophers would accept and take over certain intellectual ideas, or at least, adapt to the currents of the contemporary surroundings. In the debate about female rabbis, Cohen said: 'To me, the spirit of Cordova is the response of a community that seeks creativity, the opening of the gates of thought and practice, the creation of new vehicles to unite Jewry in spirit and practice as a consequence of challenge' (Gillman 1993: 139).

The *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides' 14 volumes on Jewish law, established him as the leading rabbinic authority of his time. His philosophical masterpiece, the above-mentioned *Guide for the Perplexed*, is a sustained treatment of Jewish thought and practice that seeks to resolve the conflict between religious knowledge and secular. Cohen's colleague Joel Roth, an expert on *halachic* issues, decided to help Cohen with a formal legal opinion, and wrote 60 pages in *The Ordination of Women as Rabbis: Studies and Response*, edited by Simon Greenberg at the Jewish Theological Seminary (1988). It contains Gerson Cohen's address to the Rabbinical Assembly convention in 1979, and Roth's contribution was very influential. Reactionary men emphasized, that the rabbi must lead the congregation in prayer as a *shaliah tzibbur*, literally 'the representative of the community', in place of other Jews who do not fulfil the obligations; but a woman cannot do that, since she herself is not obligated to observe certain commandments. According to tradition, women are freed from time-bound commandments, those that have to be performed at a specific time, for example thrice-daily prayer. 'Roth's answer is that Jewish law provides for the possibility of a woman's obligating herself to perform all the positive commandments, effectively overriding the freedom given to her by the tradition. His recommendation is that women who wish to enter the rabbinate should privately and personally perform this act of self-obligation.' (Gillman 1993: 142–3.) For many, the argument was decisive, but traditionalists were, of course, negative to all kind of 'pros'.

The rationality in Maimonides played an important role for the Conservative rabbis. Not only does *Mishneh Torah* systematize all the commandments of the Torah, it tries to show that every part of Jewish law serves a rational purpose and nothing is given for the sake of mere obedience. Chancellor Gerson Cohen, through his fiat, gave Roth's argument authenticity. The realization of the proposal concerning 'self-obligation' had a rational purpose, only a prejudiced mind can deny that. And, of course, a religious

person who is strictly Orthodox will have a ‘made up mind’, especially if he belongs to a community in which women ‘undermine community stability’ when they show nonconformity. ‘Certainly these communities have a clear interest in suppressing or ridding themselves of those members. . . . Among people who believe that there is only one truth—and that they are in possession of it—tolerating other points of view is, by definition, impossible.’ (Winston 2005: 170.)

When Hella Winston did fieldwork among Chassidic Jews in Brooklyn for her doctoral dissertation in sociology, and met Chabad emissaries, she realized that Lubavitcher outposts are rarely as insular and tight-knit as they are in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. And ‘their openness to all Jews—in addition to their use of English, more modern styles of dress, and familiarity with the outside world and secular culture—seems to make Lubavitch an attractive, non-threatening option for many Jewish people who are seeking a deeper involvement with the religion’ (Winston 2005: 72). Away from the Messiah chanting in Brooklyn, many followers started wondering, like one of Winston’s female informants, ‘if the rebbe wasn’t actually Moshiach, but merely a normal human being, why should she have to live her life according to his dictates, submitting to all the rules and regulations of the community over which he presided, even in death?’ (Winston 2005: 75) (see the Appendix below).

On the pilgrimage, Ann represents the rational Maimonides, because of her belonging to Conservative Judaism, and Lennart becomes a symbol of the esoteric interpretations made by Chabad-Lubavitch. According to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the theological system of importance is *Dirah Betachtonim*, from the brief Midrashic statement ‘God desired to have a Dirah Betachtonim’, that is, ‘a dwelling place in the lower realms’. In his thousands of essays and talks the Rebbe did expound a here-and-now oriented *Weltanschauung*.

To Maimonides, in the interpretations of leading scholars within Conservative Judaism, the messianic era is primarily a spiritual phenomenon, something transcendent. Chabad also attaches significance to the spiritual value of the messianic era, but with a striking difference in nuance. There are Chabad followers with different attitudes in this matter, but according to the Rebbe Schneerson’s ideas, Maimonides is interpreted in a way which is closer to Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (1194–1270), or Nachmanides, who devoted a lengthy discussion in his Commentary on the Pentateuch to a clarification of Maimonides’ views. Nachmanides was the foremost *halachist* of his age. Like Maimonides before him, Nachmanides was a Spaniard who was both a physician and a great Torah scholar. However, unlike the rationalist Maimonides,

Nachmanides had a strong mystical bent. His biblical commentaries are the first ones to openly incorporate the mystical teachings of *kabbalah*.

According to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, it is a principle of faith that there will come a time when God will resurrect the dead.

Maimonides insists, however, that this will be but a temporary period. Eventually, the physical body must disintegrate. Ultimately, the soul will free itself from the body's grip and live a free spiritual existence. At the end of all time, resurrection too will be in the past, for the ultimate end will be spiritual rather than physical. (Levin 2002: 136.)

Rebbe Schneerson was of another opinion. He took Nachmanides' side against Maimonides on this matter. In the theology of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 'the final state, the one in which the ultimate nature of reality will be realized, is in fact the state of resurrection. A spiritual reality does exist, even today, for souls after they pass on from this life—but it is that reality that is temporary: once the dead will be resurrected, that will be the way things will remain.' (Levin 2002: 136.) The *Dirah Betachtonim* idea of Chabad and the views of Conservative Judaism, when it comes to the final state, diverge. They also have different opinions about the ideal direction, before it is time for the terminal station.

According to *Dirah Betachtonim*, where transcendence itself is regarded as a light that blinds, hiding the essence, where escaping the body into a spiritual state amounts to being lured by the brilliant luminosity of Divine features (*manifestations*) at the expense of that which is truly rewarding, namely, a relationship with the Essence of G-d in the physical—the ultimate state of reality at the end of days must be a physical reality, souls resurrected in bodies. (Levin 2002: 137.)

In 1898 Rabbi Shalom DovBer Schneersohn, the fifth rebbe of the movement, delivered a *maamar* (Chassidic discourse/essay), and in this he wrote about the superiority of the body: 'With the power of its primary source, the body forces the soul. . .to descend and draw itself forth to animate the body' (Schneersohn 2000: 39).

On this trip between concentration camps and Holocaust museums, one pilgrim is travelling as representative of a belief system in which the dead are somewhere in a spiritual realm, transcendent, beyond this world; while the other pilgrim has a Chassidic position, with a doctrinal background that

stresses personal aspects of redemption. Lennart represents 'the mystical-magical model, which combines the mystical ascent to God with the descent of the mystic's soul that brings down the divine influence' (Idel 2002: 66). To many inside Chassidism, Maimonides was considered a 'stalwart rationalist', his rationalism and lack of mysticism was not exciting. 'It is therefore ironic that Schneerson should have chosen Maimonides to provide the substance for a modern declaration of the imminent redemption. . . Whatever the reason for his endorsement of Maimonides, it had the desired effect. The rationalist Maimonides became a defender of the apocalyptic, messianic world view of the highly mystical Habad Hasidim.' (Ehrlich 2004: 78.)

Within Chabad-Lubavitch, during the last decade, there has been an extraordinary messianic fervour, because many followers continued to affirm the status of messiah of the Rebbe after the summer of 1994. 'Even during the latter years of the Rebbe's life, Chabad messianism was *sui generis*. . . for the messianists in Lubavitch, imminent redemption is a certainty, and the redeemer is Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson' (Berger 2008: 22).

The Rebbe declared this to be the generation of the redemption, and according to a Maimonidean passage, he was said to have fulfilled all the criteria for a presumptive Messiah. When he died, Chabad leaflets pointed to Maimonides, and the great medieval rationalist was mobilized to defend a failed messianic mission. (Shabetai Tzevi's prophet cited the same Maimonidean excerpt *anno dazumal*.) 'Needless to say, the Rebbe's death did create an intellectual and emotional crisis. The primary arguments for the Rebbe as Messiah had manifestly collapsed. If each generation must have its Messiah, this presumably means that he must be among the living, and any appeal to Maimonides' criteria seemed clearly impossible.' (Berger 2008: 24.) But no one should underestimate the power of faith; when a prophet has spoken, no further evidence is necessary. Many booklets were produced, explaining that the Rebbe never died. He was 'absolutely not dead like other people are' and the funeral was a 'test for carnal eyes' (Berger 2008: 25). Influential people in the centres at Crown Heights in Brooklyn and Kfar Chabad in Israel believe that Schneerson will 'return from the dead (or from his place of concealment) and lead the world to redemption. With rare, courageous exceptions, the hasidim who do not believe this, among them some impressive intellectuals and communal leaders, remain publicly silent in the face of social pressures that are very difficult to resist.' (Berger 2008: 26.)

Well, one of the major factors affecting Schneerson's later leadership 'and an important motivator in the expansion of the movement's activities and

influence, was the emergence of a strong messianic element in Schneerson's teachings' (Ehrlich 2004: 82).

Belief in the resurrection of the dead, a key element in Judaism's vision of the messianic age, dates from the period of the Pharisees. 'While the Pharisees accepted the idea of resurrection, the Sadducees rejected it emphatically' (Robinson 2000: 192). If we compare with the situation at the times of someone called a Messiah:

Jesus wanted to prepare his contemporaries for the kingdom. But he neither delineated a chronology of life eternal nor a geography of the beyond. Even the resurrection of the dead was not a central theme of his proclamation, though he believed in it and therefore sided on this issue with the Pharisees and against the Sadducees [cf. Mark 12:18–27]. (Schwartz 2000: 80.)

The Pharisees were, depending on the time, a political party, a social movement, and a school of thought among Jews that flourished during the Second Temple Era (536 BCE–70 CE). After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Pharisaic sect was re-established as Rabbinic Judaism. Different groups in different situations produced apocalyptic ideas and texts, and if we call it a genre, it was characterized by a conventional manner of revelation, through heavenly journeys or visions, often 'mediated by an angel'.

The conceptual framework assumed that this life was bounded by the heavenly world and by the prospect of eschatological judgment. A revelation of an apocalyptic kind,

can provide support in the face of persecution (e.g. Daniel); reassurance in the face of culture shock (Book of the Watchers) or social powerlessness (the Similitudes of Enoch); reorientation in the wake of historical trauma (2 *Baruch*, 3 *Baruch*); consolation for the dismal fate of humanity (4 *Ezra*); or comfort for the inevitability of death (the *Testament of Abraham*). The constant factor is that the problem is put in perspective by the other-worldly revelation of a transcendent world and eschatological judgement. (Collins 1998: 280.)

But there are movements that hope for a reversal of the social order, their goals are 'this-worldly, the attainment of heaven on earth, and they are often led by a charismatic prophet. . .the messianic age would approximate to heaven on

earth. The career of Jesus of Nazareth can be viewed as that of a charismatic prophet who inspired a millenarian movement.' (Collins 1998: 281.)

The texts mentioned above are reflective compositions 'that look back on a crisis such as the destruction of Jerusalem and try to make sense of it in retrospect. The goal they envision often includes the transformation of the earth, at least for a period. But the most distinctive features of apocalyptic hope are otherworldly.' (Collins 1998: 281.)

Charismatic leaders play a very limited role in this literature, and after the failure of the Jewish revolts against Rome, the rabbis turned away from eschatological expectations. When it comes to Chabad, it is interesting that various aspects of the tradition, i.e. messianic and eschatological beliefs, flourished in the *heichalot* literature, and developed within Chassidism. *Heichalot* (the Palaces) refers to a collection of Jewish literature from Talmudic times. Many motifs of later *kabbalah* are based on the *heichalot* texts. According to Moshe Idel, the *heichalot* literature was written in the Near East sometime in the middle of the first millennium CE. 'It was transmitted to European Jewry, and the most important Jewish community was the small sect of Hasidei Ashkenaz [Chassidic Ashkenazi] active from the end of the twelfth century to the middle of the thirteenth century. The mystical aspects of the study of Torah were also adopted and elaborated by those medieval masters.' (Idel 2002: 176.)

Because of their present affiliations, when it comes to denomination, Ann stands for a vertical visionary version, and Lennart represents horizontal eschatological concerns associated with messianism. But they have something in common: they both want to reconcile themselves to the Holocaust.

To Schneerson, the hope provided by the messianic ideology justified the atrocities of the Holocaust, the growth of secularism, the decay of Orthodoxy, and the many other ills faced by the post-war generation. The messianic redemption also explained to Schneerson many apparent irregularities in the world order and the eschatological realm. He could explain what looked like absurdities as pre-messianic birth pangs, events that were necessary precursors to the coming of the *mashiach*. Events that had seemed illogical or inhuman, such as the Holocaust, could be fitted into a messianic worldview. As part of the essential change that would occur in the cosmic nature of the world with the advent of the *mashiach*, they could be endured more easily. (Ehrlich 2004: 83.)

When it comes to opposites, the two representatives of two different thought patterns will be put under a magnifying glass.



### 'This-worldliness' and 'other-worldliness'

The terms, 'this-worldliness' and 'other-worldliness', are often used in the study of religion, but in different ways and sometimes in senses which cut across one another. The two words basically represent a dichotomy. The question is, though, what sort of a dichotomy (or dichotomies) do they represent?

A survey made by Arvind Sharma (1981), of the various uses, suggests the following directions in which the dichotomy seems to have moved:

1. The words obviously possess a spatial connotation, to begin with. This world is right here; the other world is up there somewhere. There seems to be a simple correspondence here between the earth as this world and heaven as the other world. But this correspondence is soon lost in the study of comparative religion, when, for instance, Hinduism is referred to as other-worldly, and in Hinduism it is not *svarga* (Heaven) but *moksa* which is ultimately sought.
2. The two words can also acquire a temporal connotation, for this world is not only right here, but is here right now, while the other world is not only up there, but is to be reached usually at some point in the future, usually after one's death. This use can cut across the former one, for the other world, inasmuch as it has paradisiacal associations, may be visualized as existing on the earth, as in early Shinto which shows traces of a horizontal cosmology. In Amidism, the devout repair to the Western paradise, but significantly this other world is not referred to as 'above,' but to the West (though it could be maintained that it is both above and to the West). In popular Taoism the Three Islands of the Blessed (San Hsien Shan) are located somewhere 'between the Chinese and Japanese mainlands, but nobody who had gone there had come back'. In this case the temporal connotation of the terms 'here' could often mean 'in this life' and 'other' 'after death'. Such a criterion would make those schools of Hinduism which accept *jivanmukti*, or living liberation, this-worldly and the rest other-worldly.
3. Sometimes, probably as a result of the overtones of the word 'worldliness', this-worldliness is associated with materialism, and other-worldliness with spiritualism either of the genuine or escapist variety, but more often with the escapist. Yet an allegedly this-worldly religion like Confucianism can hardly be called materialistic; it is rather essentially humanistic.
4. Sometimes this-worldliness might be used to refer to a view of the universe which regards this perceptible world as the only reality and which

denies the existence of any other world. Ancient Hindu and modern scientific materialism could be seen as taking such a view. Yet even here, associating such a view with materialism may be rather facile, for even then there are two ways of viewing this world. It may be seen in a completely materialistic way, and then man who inhabits the earth is a creature subject entirely to laws of matter. However, this world may be seen in another way as embodying some sacred value or spiritual reality, and in this case it has a good deal in common with 'other-worldly views'. In this-worldly estimates of man, however, man achieves his fulfilment, be it material or spiritual or an integration of the two, here and now in this earthly life.

5. The above remarks suggest that the distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly religions may turn on the *locus* of salvation specified in a religion. If this be so, then again ambiguity is likely to arise in some cases. Islam could clearly be called an 'other-worldly' religion by this criterion (a fact which is interesting in itself as it is usually considered a 'this-worldly religion'), but the case of Christianity would present a problem. Early Christianity, inasmuch as it awaited the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, would then have to be regarded as other-worldly, inasmuch as it seemed to locate Heaven somewhere up there in the sky.
6. This-worldliness and other-worldliness could also be made to relate to the means by which salvation is attained rather than to its location. Thus, if one achieved salvation right here on this earth by one's own effort, it could be regarded as 'this-worldly,' as contrasted with, say, salvation through grace from a 'wholly other.' This distinction, as between *tariki* and *jiriki*, made in Japan seems relevant here.<sup>6</sup>
7. The dichotomy between this-worldly and other-worldly means of salvation or its site should not blind one to the fact that a religion also offers a 'this-worldly' means of transcending mundane human existence in giving a standard of morals and ethics.

It is clear, then, that the words 'this-worldliness' and 'other-worldliness' both by themselves and, especially in their application to the various religious traditions of mankind, are capable of a very versatile usage and that this versatility

6 *Jiriki* (Self power), *tariki* (Other power). 'Self power' refers to the way of seeking to attain enlightenment by the power of one's own practice, while 'Other power' refers to relying on help received from the Buddha.

seriously impairs, if it does not destroy, the dichotomy one tries to set up by using these words (cf. Sharma 1981: 36–8).

Ann belongs to a liberal branch of Conservative Judaism, and Lennart belongs to the Chassidic Orthodox group Chabad-Lubavitch, and both of them switch between this-worldliness and other-worldliness, when it comes to religious beliefs. This was the pilgrimage within the bus tour between concentration camps, the hike between the facts of Arvind Sharma. To meet his enlightening clarity, was a pilgrimage from strength to strength, and it made the pilgrim behind the pen realize that labels are there just to be removed.

Finally, if we look at Chabad Lubavitch today, the words of Martin Buber are illuminating, since he pointed out that: 'In Judaism the border between the two realms appears at first glance to be drawn with utmost sharpness. . . [but of greatest importance in Chassidism] is the powerful tendency, preserved in personal as well as in communal existence, to overcome the fundamental separation between the sacred and the profane' (Buber 1988: 20). Malka Touger has been travelling all over the world to talk about the role of a Jewish woman, and together with many, many conscientious and diligent Chabad followers, she has inspired and directed a broad array of outreach programmes and educational institutions throughout the world (Touger 2006). Both men and women in the movement work hard to make Jews everywhere answer to Judaism in the affirmative, and to identify with their 'spiritual heritage'; and the stories of Chabad-Lubavitch outreach around the world are not negligible. Many liberal rabbis are concerned about the fact that Chassidism is so widespread: from Anchorage, Alaska, to Surfers Paradise, Australia; from Novosibirsk, Siberia, to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; from Kinshasa, Congo, to Beijing, China, and everywhere in between, you will find Chabad representatives. When other-worldly Jewish pilgrims become increasingly secularised, this-worldly pilgrims prevail in areas where Judaism has been suppressed, and in cities with assimilated Jews. But since those labels are doubtful and woolly, we leave them aside, and underline one thing which is clear: Messianism is back to stay!

## Appendix

According to Gershom Scholem, based on Maimonides' ideas, we can distinguish different attitudes when it comes to the messianic element in Judaism. 'The conservative attitude. . . is present-oriented, setting the messianic era beyond the realm of human pursuit' (Dan 1999: 199). Moses Maimonides' rational

renunciation of the utopian version of messianism, according to Scholem, was earnest. The messianic era will not fundamentally transform the character of human existence in the physical world. ‘Even more important is Maimonides’ insistence that messianic redemption will bring no change in the nature of religious worship; it will alter neither the ritual and ethical commandment, nor the spiritual and intellectual adherence to God that is the most important part of religion for the rationalist’ (Dan 1999: 200). But the followers of the latest Chabad-Lubavitch Rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneerson, were convinced that he was the long-awaited King Messiah (Naor 1998: xxxviii). ‘The belief in the Rebbe’s Messianic role was augmented by the fact that he was the seventh generation from Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady. The rabbis, in reference to Moses, had said: “All seventh are beloved”. (Moses was the seventh generation from Abraham—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kehath, Amram, Moses.)’ (Naor 1998: lvi–lvii.) In the beginning of the 1990s, Chabad published announcements in newspapers and with pamphlets followers openly proclaimed the imminent coming of the Messiah. In July 1991 the Rebbe aroused great emotional frenzy, when ‘he spoke of the coming of Messiah in sharp and clear terms, such as had never been heard before’ (Ravitzky 1996: 197). Earlier, the Rebbe said: ‘We already stand upon the threshold of the days of Messiah, at the beginning of redemption’ (Ravitzky 1996: 198). No doubt, many followers were excited, and the Rebbe was not totally happy with the fact, that many ‘were gazing at him during prayer, rather than concentrating their hearts entirely upon their Father in heaven. This notwithstanding, however, the messianic dynamic has a power of its own and a logic of its own.’ (Ravitzky 1996: 198). For Maimonides, man’s fulfilment is not dependent on the coming of the Messiah. ‘Messianism, in fact, is not a postulate of his philosophical thought; regardless of how he may twist it to fit his rationalism, it remains even in this minimal state of utopianism a pure element of the stock of tradition’ (Scholem 1971: 30). But Scholem has been criticized by several *kabbalah* researchers for repeatedly focusing on ancient and medieval Jewish descriptions of the messianic era, when it comes to the redemptive process. In those texts, redemption is often pictured ‘as the intrusion of an external, transcendent force into history, bringing about its end’ (Dan 1999: 201). After 1772, Chassidism presented a new type of mystical leader who could give redemption to anyone who decided to follow him. The *tzaddik*, like the Messiah, moves spiritually between the material world and the divine, and he is supposed to have redemptive powers. According to Conservative Judaism, a cornerstone of Maimonides’ theology is that all of our characterizations of God are metaphors.

In the *Statement of Principles* published by The Rabbinical Assembly, we can read that God is a supreme, supernatural being, ‘a presence and a power that transcends us’ (*Emet ve-Emunah* 1988: 18); in Chabad-Lubavitch, though, God is here through the *tzaddik*. The soul of the mystical leader is supposed to penetrate the followers. In Chassidic Orthodox Judaism the *tzaddik* bridges the gap between man and God, and make redemption an everyday experience (Dan 1999: 84). From Rebbe Schneerson’s discourse delivered 1977: ‘G-d conferred with the souls of *tzaddikim*: God foresaw the pleasure that He would receive from the souls performing their divine service below’ (Schneerson 2001: 34).

Since the publication of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, scholars have not been sure whether to take Maimonides’ words literally, or whether to take them as clues pointing to a hidden, deeper meaning (cf. Ravitzky 1981, 1990, 2005; Strauss 1988). Of the seven reasons for using contradictions, Maimonides says he will avail himself of two. The first is relatively unproblematic: sometimes it is necessary for a teacher to say one thing to reach a student’s level of understanding, and say something else when the student becomes more advanced. The second is more troublesome: on very obscure matters, it is necessary to launch a discussion that proceeds according to one assumption and later one that proceeds according to another. Maimonides adds: ‘In such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means’ (Seeskin 1996: 90).

There is a general agreement that Maimonides’ writing is esoteric to the degree that he addresses difficult topics and does not put everything he has to say on a particular topic in any one place. The question is whether his esotericism goes deeper than this. For example, he criticizes Aristotle’s views on the eternity of the world. Does this mean that he believed in creation, or that he was really committed to eternity? ‘For the existence of the world—created from nothing—was and is a miracle. . . [we should] not expect the world to continue to exist. We should expect it to return to its natural state: nonexistence.’ (Schneerson of Lubavitch 2002: 14–15.) Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson of Lubavitch referred to Rambam, that is Maimonides, over and over again in his discourse from 1869. Chabad-Lubavitch encourages all followers to study Maimonides, since he is one of the greatest esoteric philosophers in the eyes of the Lubavitcher Rebbes. In the reading instructions for *Tanya*, the fundamental Chabad text, Maimonides is of huge importance.

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## Muslim Pilgrimage as Education by Experience

In Christian tradition, pilgrimage is connected with hardship and sacrifice. It has been used as a penance for penitents. The pilgrimage itself is a kind of sacrifice. The Muslim pilgrimage is different. The atmosphere is serious, but full of confidence. The pilgrimage strengthens faith through the spirit of community with millions of other Muslims, who share the same faith. In that respect it resembles the mass meetings of revivalist Christianity. Ghulam Sarwar, Director of the Muslim Educational Trust in Great Britain, has written about *hajj*, the pilgrimage of Islam: 'The occasion may rightly be called the *Annual International Muslim Assembly*' (Sarwar 2003: 74). The pilgrimage means that Muslims are brought together in action, walking, running, praying, throwing pebbles, slaughtering and, most importantly, standing for half a day in the desert. All these experiences are used for education through experience. The pilgrimage is an opportunity to educate the Muslims in religious matters. It is a typical example of 'learning by doing'.

This article will elaborate the content of this education as it is performed today. The purpose is twofold: to show how well the pilgrimage is fit for education and to investigate how this opportunity is utilized today. The account is built on contemporary theological literature about Islam. Most of the works are introductions to Islam, written by well-known and esteemed scholars. They are meant to give elementary information about Muslim life. The purpose is not to decide what is right or wrong in the performance, or in the interpretation of the rituals. The purpose is to describe what is taught by the religious leaders today. They seem to regard some traditions as dubious, as they might be perceived as superstitious. They might also have been accused of this by Western scholars. That does not mean that they are superstitious. The aim of the article is only to submit a discussion and an analysis of a trend in contemporary Islam.

## Old traditions, new interpretations

The Muslim pilgrimage has derived its content from old religious traditions, established before the time of Muhammad (Wellhausen 1927: 68 f.). There are a lot of instructions for pilgrimage in the Quran, which confirm and explain these old customs. For Muslims it is important that Muhammad's message was not a new but an old religion, the original religion of mankind. The correct religion of Adam and Abraham should be restored by Muhammad's revelations. Therefore Muslim authors underline that 'many of the rites of the Hajj go back to the Prophet Ibrahiim'. (Hamid 1990: 126.)

Old religious traditions from the Arabian Peninsula were incorporated into the 'new' religion and perhaps no aspect of Islam contains so many elements from the past as the pilgrimage. They must be preserved as a sign of continuity and reinterpreted as a sign of the importance of the revelations of Muhammad. Is the Islamic 'adoption' of old pilgrimage rites merely a way to create connections between the new religion and the old traditions of Mecca? Is it only a way to prove that Islam is a restoration of an original religion? Are the old traditions, on the contrary, so strange and unlike the message of Muhammad that there is an incongruity between them? That is what 'orientalist' (in the sense which Edward Said has ascribed to the word) scholars have asserted. In 1951, Gustav Edmund von Grunebaum, a well-known Middle East scholar from the University of Chicago, wrote the following:

The very tenuous relation between the old ritual and the new religion is striking. Aside perhaps from the ceremonies centering in the Ka'ba, there is no attempt at an ideological or even mythological integration. The practice and precept of the prophet constitute the only link between Islamic and pre-Islamic worship. Nothing in the doctrine of Islam suggests the *wuquf* in Arafat as the culmination of a specifically Muslim pilgrimage. (Grunebaum 1988: 35, first published 1951.)

This is a misleading statement. There have been many attempts to connect the new religion with the old ritual, which also has been changed in many ways to annihilate offensive elements. The heritage created an important mission for Muslims. They had to keep and reform the old rites and a British scholar writes, half a century later, about the reforms of pilgrimage:

They changed them in four ways: by cleansing them of their polytheist associations; by combining them in a single act of devotion. . . ; by mak-

ing it into the culminating spiritual aspiration of every Muslim; and by attaching its places and events to the roots of monotheism, seeing 'Arafat as the site of the reunion of Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Paradise, Mina as the spot where Abraham sacrificed a ram in place of his son Ishmael, and the Ka'aba as the sacred house founded by Adam and restored by Abraham and Ishmael, with the tombs of Hagar and Ishmael beside it. (Stewart 1995: 90 f.)

The Muslims had to preserve the old traditions but adapt them to the right design and teach people the new interpretations of the old customs. This is what still continues. The 'cleansing from polytheist associations' is completed in theological considerations but far from accomplished in practice. The struggle for reinterpretations has been in progress since the time of Muhammad. According to Grunebaum, the standing at Arafat (or Arafat) has no connection with 'the doctrine of Islam'. According to Muslims, it is quite possible to interpret the *wuquf* at Arafat as an adequate expression of the new faith, and today it is on the contrary regarded as the most apparent expression of the true Islamic faith. Other parts of the pilgrimage are depreciated or opposed, but the standing at Arafat is emphasised as the climax and the only obligatory element of the pilgrimage.

Old traditions create new objections when times change. Traditions are opposed or interpreted in a new way. Some of the objections have their origin in Western scholarship. Western scholars have written that kissing the black stone in Kaba is a remnant of the old cult of holy stones. We know that a cult of holy stones had been common in the Middle East in antiquity. In Israel, there were for example the stones *urim* and *tummim* (1 Sam. 14:41). Circumambulation around Kaba resembles what the priests of Baal did according to the Bible (1 Kings 18:26). God did not answer those prayers. Christians seldom believe that the Devil appeared physically when Christ was tempted in the desert (Matt. 4:1). Do Muslims still believe in a Devil with a carnal and corporeal body, which might be chased away with pebbles? Kissing the black stone, the stoning of Satan, the sacrifice of animals, cutting hair and beard, is it not all superstition or cruel remnants of an old religion with another view of God? Why shall we sacrifice goats to God? Does he demand bloody sacrifices?

This double dependency, on old customs and correct orthodoxy, has characterized Muslim pilgrimage throughout its history. It was obvious from the beginning that old customs must be opposed and superstitious belief from the time before Muhammad must be rejected. In modern times new problems

have appeared when Muslim scholars have discovered possible misinterpretations of the traditions of pilgrimage. Those questions raise discussions among Muslims in our time. It must be underlined once again that all this is an account of current Muslim theological discussions and opinions. The intention is to describe, not to evaluate or propagate any view of the problem as right or wrong.

The distinguishing quality of the Muslim pilgrimage is connected to almost all parts of the faith or the creed and salvation history, from the creation of the universe to the Last Judgement. Let us follow the pilgrim through the events of the days in Mecca and Medina to see how the content of Islamic belief is called up through places, buildings, actions and obligations in Mecca and its neighbourhood. One type of information is available in the textbooks about Islam which have been written by western scholars. Another type is to be found in the books of Muslim authors, written from within, generally with the conviction that Islam is the first and last religion of mankind, the original religion which has been restored through the revelation of the Quran. They find plenty of opportunities in the pilgrimage to propagate this creed, but the different parts must then be valued and interpreted according to their instruction.

## Guide-books

There are a lot of manuals and books with information about the Islamic faith which describe the pilgrimage for Muslims and non-Muslims. This article is built on modern guides to Islam and Islamic pilgrimage, published in the West to prepare Muslims for the pilgrimage and help non-Muslims to know and understand it. The most important purpose is perhaps to annihilate objections and misunderstandings about the pilgrimage, in Islam called *hajj*. In 1957, Dr Muhammad Hamidullah at Centre Culturel Islamique in Paris published an *Introduction to Islam*, which then appeared in a lot of editions in about twenty different languages. It can be compared with a later book from the New World, *What everyone should know about Islam and Muslims* by Suzanne Haneef, published in 1979 by Kazi Publications in Chicago. Suzanne Haneef is a Muslim convert from Christianity who, after her conversion, has been responsible for Islamic education in the USA. Hammudah Abd al-Ati's (1928–76) book *Islam in Focus* is also regarded as a valuable introduction. The third, revised edition was published in 1999 and has been translated to Swedish among a lot of other languages. Mawlana Mawdudi (1903–79) is known as a

representative of Islamistic theology. His teaching and opinions are expressed in *Fundamentals of Islam* (1st ed. 1975) and *Towards Understanding Islam* (1978). The second book has also been published in Swedish and Norwegian. Another modern book is Ghulam Sarwar's *Islam, beliefs and teachings* (1st edn 1980, 7th 2003). Ghulam Sarwar is director of The Muslim Educational Trust in Britain and the book has been printed in more than 250,000 copies.

But there are also some comments on the Western text-books about Islam referring to a lingering 'orientalism' in the description of the Muslim pilgrimage. An important example is the already introduced *Muhammadan Festivals* by G. E. von Grunebaum (1909–72), a scholar who taught at the Universities of Chicago and California. His book was first published in 1951, but was then reprinted many times. The elementary textbooks on Islam are not always so exhaustive in their descriptions of pilgrimage, but what is written might nevertheless be misleading, because the account reflects rites that are under debate or disappearing. All scholars have not always noticed how the Muslims have changed their rituals, instructions, and interpretations of old customs.

### The state of *ihram*

When the pilgrims arrive at Mecca 'they enter into a state of consecration known as *ihram*' (Haneef 1979: 52). They must change clothes. Male pilgrims shall wear a dress unique to *hajj*, consisting of two pieces of unsown cloth. No specific garment is prescribed for women but they must cover their bodies, 'leaving only their faces and hands exposed' (Haneef 1979: 52). What is the explanation of this custom? According to Grunebaum it is an ancient Semitic ritual:

The dress, identical with the *hulla*, the shrouding garments of the pagan Arabs, and again the dress of the gods, is in all likelihood the sacred dress of the old Semites. The upper garment of the High Priest in the Old Testament was seamless. The ephod of the Jewish priests, worn around the hips, and the *me'il*, worn around the shoulders, were white. (Grunebaum 1988: 27.)

It is obvious that the *ihram* dress is a heritage from times before Muhammad, although some scholars assert that people in olden times were running around Kaba naked and that this was strictly forbidden by Muhammad's revelations (Mawdudi 1978a: 211; Tabbarah 1978: 173). The Muslim writers have

no objections to the dress and give edifying explanations of the custom. The dress shall express equality in front of God. Rich and poor, well-known and unknown, powerful and suppressed, all are equal during the *hajj*. When the Muslim comes to Mecca

. . . a deep sense of smallness and insignificance comes to him, and all the trappings and defences of his ego fall away as he realizes that God alone is great and that none of His slaves can bring any of his worldly props and privileges with him to confront the glory and majesty of his Lord (Haneef 1979: 55).

It seems to be very important to experience equality as servants to the Lord in a way which reminds the pilgrims of the first time in Eden and future life in Paradise. For the standing at Arafa it is also extremely important that everybody is dressed in the same way. All Muslims seem to perceive the standing as an anticipation of the Last Judgement and for them it is obvious that all human beings then will be dressed in white cloth. According to Muhammad Hamidullah the Muslims demonstrate this equality already on earth during the pilgrimage:

The world brotherhood of Muslims manifests itself in the most vivid manner. The believers, without distinction of race, language, birthplace, or even class, feel the obligation to go there, and to mix with one another in a spirit of fraternal equality. They camp together in the desert, and perform their religious duties in common. (Hamidullah 1974: 73 f.)

All pilgrims are prohibited to use perfumes or to do any damage to any living thing, whether plants or animals, in the territory of Mecca. They must not carry arms, quarrel or insult other persons. Marriage and sexual intercourse is forbidden. They are forbidden to wear shoes covering ankles, cut hair or clip nails. Men must not cover the head, women not the face (Sarwar 2003: 75). This is a life without evil and carnal relations. All this resembles life in the original paradise of Eden and the future paradise in heaven. The pilgrims live like angels during a short time on earth as a preparation for a similar life in eternity. It is an education by experience about the final goal of human beings.



## Kaba

The Kaba is an important building in Mecca, especially during the *hajj*, when millions of Muslims visit the city. For the Muslims, Mecca is the centre of the world and Kaba is the centre of Mecca. The building is regarded as the oldest temple in the world (Tabbarah 1978: 172) by Muslims, as it is built and reconstructed by the greatest prophets:

The Quran (3:96) does not exaggerate when it says that this is the oldest House in the world dedicated by mankind to God and to the cult of monotheism. If one were to think only of Abraham – who according to the Islamic tradition, was but the restorer of the edifice erected originally by Adam – it would still be older than the temple of Jerusalem, constructed by Solomon. No other place of worship older than the Ka'bah of Mecca, is known to be still functioning. (Hamidullah 1974: 71.)

Here appears the idea of Adam as the master builder of Kaba. According to Islamic tradition Adam had built the first Kaba. It was destroyed but rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael. Some authors assert that only Abraham has built it (Mawdudi 1978b: 139). It is often said that Abraham is the most important person as origin of the actions during the *hajj* (Hamid 1990: 126), but that it is an exaggeration to emphasise the connection between Islam with the original religion of mankind. In rites and devotion Adam is also important as the person who built the first Kaba and met his wife outside the city. Hagar and Ishmael are also significant for the rites.

The prophet Muhammad himself has given the pilgrimage its current design in many parts, but that is not so often mentioned, in order not to support Western scholars who assert that most of the rites are created by Muhammad and is an imitation of his Farewell Pilgrimage in 632 (Grunebaum 1988: 18). The history of the world, from the creation of man and universe, is repeated during the *hajj* rites, but Abraham is perhaps the most important because he is considered as origin of the real and correct cult in Mecca.

## The Zamzam well

Ishmael is said to have helped his father in the construction of Kaba. It is not said if that happened before or after the incident when he was saved from death by God who helped his mother Hagar to find the spring of Zamzam. A

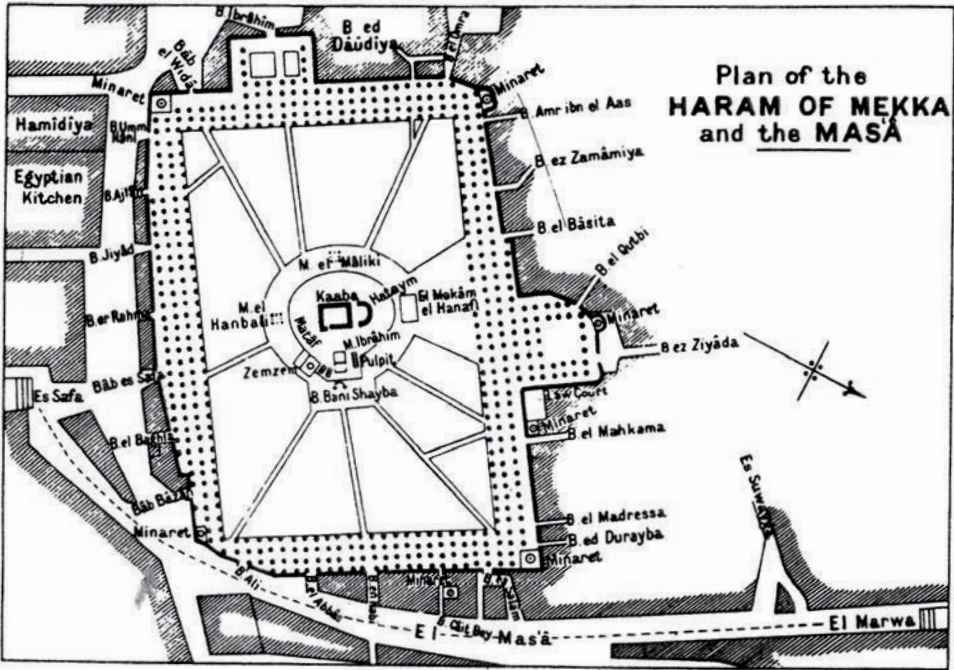
Western author has written that the 'child' Ishmael was saved from death by the spring (Armstrong 1993: 254). According to the Bible Ishmael was thirteen years old when he and his mother were expelled from their home and forced to live in the desert, so he was hardly a child. Hagar got some water in a bag to take with her, but soon there was no more water, so Hagar began to seek for a well and finally found the Zamzam well. No Muslim has denied that Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was driven away and he might have been old enough to help his father in the reconstruction of Kaba before the expulsion. Muslims also assert that Ishmael was the son who should have been sacrificed:

Although the Old Testament (Gen. 22:1–2) refers to Isaac as the object of the intended sacrifice, the error in this account is made clear by the fact that it refers to Isaac as Abraham's "only son," when it is an historic fact that his son Ishmael was born several years before his son Isaac (Haneef 1979: 51).

It is interesting to note how the idea of 'historic fact' here is used. That Ishmael was born 'several years' before Isaac must be supported by the Bible. In that respect the Bible is reliable, but it is wrong in its statement that Ishmael was the intended sacrifice. Muslims can refer to the Quran, sura 37: 112/112, where it is written that Abraham got the promise about Isaac as a reward for his readiness to sacrifice Ishmael.

The story about the well in the desert is proof of God's providence and will teach us to trust it. Suzanne Haneef tells us:

Abraham brought his wife Hagar (Hajirah) and son Ishmael to the barren valley of Mecca, then a desolate, uninhabited spot surrounded by stark lava hills, and left them there at God's command. When their supply of water was exhausted and the child began to cry with thirst, Hagar began a hurried search for water, running back and forth seven times between two small hillocks. Her search proved futile, but when she turned back to her son, God revealed to her the spring of Zamzam flowing at his feet. It has flowed continuously since that time. The presence of water in the midst of the inhospitable desert attracted settlers to the spot which in time became the city of Mecca. In later years Abraham together with his son Ishmael built the Ka'aba very close to the spring. (Haneef 1979: 55.)



Plan of the Haram of Mekka (von Grunebaum 1988).

According to this text, the spring of Zamzam is the very reason for the existence of the city of Mecca. The pilgrims are obliged to run seven times between the hills *Safa* and *Marwa* and this running is called *sa'i*. It is not unlikely that Mecca got its location because of the well, and that it is a reminder of the cult of holy wells in Arabia before Muhammad. Many pilgrims have still a deep reverence for the water. They soak cloth in the water, dry it in the sun and take it home to be used as their future shrouding. They buy bottles with the Zamzam water to take home 'for healing purposes' (Hitti 1970: 38). Pilgrims drink the water (Waddy 1982: 21) and the spring is said to be 'bathed in by the pilgrims who attend the hajj' (Geaves 2006: 122).

The running can be perceived as an act of reverence for the holy water in the well. The rites around the Zamzam well thus also need to be interpreted in a more 'Islamic' way. Hagar is an ideal for all women and all mothers. That is why Muslims shall perform *sa'i*: 'So one repeats this act in the same place where Hagar did it, to pay homage to maternal love and in thanksgiving for the mercy of God' (Hamidullah 1974: 73). She cared about her son and trust-

ed God. She was in despair but was delivered from destruction. We must always trust God, also in hopeless situations. Not a word about holy water, bath or drinking.

This is a typical example of the modern trend to deduce ethical education from every detail and evade associations to the cult of created objects. The rite shall give them time to remember Hagar, Ishmael and their terrible situation in the desert. The possibility of divine protection in difficult problems seems to be proved by God's salvation of Ishmael. Ishmael is also important as the connecting link between Abraham and Muhammad and for that reason a proof of the faith in Islam as the religion of Abraham and of Adam.

### The circumambulation in Mecca

Mecca is also the city of Muhammad. He was born there, received his first revelations in the neighbourhood and began to preach the restored message of Abraham among the inhabitants of Mecca. From that place he made his nightly journey to Jerusalem and in 624 he had a revelation about Mecca as the correct direction for prayer, the *qibla*. Memories of Muhammad meet the Muslim pilgrim in several places, but Kaba is the most important symbol of monotheism, because Muhammad is said to have annihilated all traces of idolatry there:

Although the central purpose of the Ka'aba was always acknowledged to be the worship of God, for a time, beginning long before the birth of Prophet Muhammad, it was the centre of the idolatrous worship of the pagan Arabs. Inside it stood a vast number of idols which were worshipped together with God. When the prophet gained the final victory over the Meccans, he demolished the idols and the Ka'aba was again restored to its original sacred purpose, that of worship of Almighty God alone. (Haneef 1979: 53.)

The pilgrim shall 'greet' the Holy Mosque of Kaba by performing a brief *salat* or prayer and circle around the Kaba seven times. These are old rituals according to Grunebaum:

In any case, not only is the rite of walking and running around a stone, an altar, or a sanctuary of any kind attested by pre-Islamic poetry in which wild kine are likened to virgins circling an idol, but can be traced

in Jewish ritual in which at one time during the Feast of Tabernacles the altar was circled once on each of the six first days and seven times on the seventh. And in more recent times sevenfold circumambulation has become connected with the tombs of certain Muslim saints. (Grunebaum 1988: 29.)

Western scholars like Grunebaum obviously regard the circumambulation as an ancient rite with connections to superstitious traditions. The Muslims are ambivalent. If the rite existed earlier it can be said to have been originated by Abraham, but it must be understood in a new way after Muhammad. According to Muslim scholars Abraham had established the cult in Mecca but people had destroyed it by changing the way it was performed and Muhammad had to restore the correct cult:

The obligation of pilgrimage to God's sacred House, hence, goes back to the times of Abraham. Abraham then died, and after him his son Ismail. A long period of time passed, after which people started to introduce forbidden acts of polytheism and idolatry or of circling the Ka'bah naked. God instructed Mohammed to put an end to such violations and sanctify the rites of pilgrimage from innovations and acts of heresy. (Tabbarah 1978: 173.)

Muslim scholars and theologians emphasize that people have ambulated around Kaba since it was built. Abraham had decided that it was an expression of genuine reverence to walk around it. After the time of Abraham it degenerated and was done as an expression of idolatry for a long time after the death of Ishmael and the appearance of Muhammad. The proof is that they then were naked and used it as an opportunity for business:

How *Hajj* was mutilated in that period of ignorance can be gauged from the fact that it was turned into a fair which used to be held from year to year. Many big tribes with their gangs used to come to Mecca and encamp there separately. . . . There used to be circumambulation of Ka'ba but how? Women and men all went round and round stark naked and said: "We shall go before God in the same condition in which our mothers gave birth to us." *Ibadat* was performed in the mosque of Abraham but how? By clapping of hands, by whistling and by blowing horns. (Mawdudi 1978a: 211 f.)

It is evident from this what is held to be unethical in the Muslim cult and culture. To be naked is very shameful and it is not accepted to make noise, particularly not by instruments like horns. So severely had the divine service decayed when God gave Muhammad the directing principles for restoration of the true form of Islam. The walking can, as in other pilgrimages, be accepted as an expression of piety. Noise and nakedness is a proof of superstitious attitudes. When they are eliminated, the circumambulation is 'clean' again and can be accepted. The problem is that the definition of the difference between superstition and piety seems to be arbitrary, adapted for the aim.

The circle ambulation is called *tawaf* and shall emphasize the relation between God and man: 'Tawaf is an acknowledgement of worship to God, submission and devotion to Him, as well as a reminder of the unity that keeps Muslims together' (Tabbarah 1978: 178). It is important to underline that *tawaf* is an expression of worship, submission and devotion. It is not a superstitious rite of reverence for the building or the place as *axis mundi*. Circumambulation might also be interpreted as an imitation of cosmic movements, which might be the origin of the following words: 'There is also a natural feeling of cosmic identity on the part of the pilgrim as he goes anti-clockwise around the cube-like structure of the Ka'bah' (Hamid 1990: 126).

These kinds of comments are very unusual nowadays. All associations with reverence for buildings, tombs and places on earth must be wiped out and replaced with 'submission', to Islam, to God and God alone. In the manuals for *hajj* it is seldom written that the pilgrims shall circle anti-clockwise. Perhaps the authors will avoid mentioning it as it might appear superstitious. Another rule is that the pilgrim shall go around the Kaba three times 'at a rapid pace and four at a normal walk' (Lippman 1982: 27). Details like these are often left out by Muslim authors of today and it seems obvious that they regard them as non-essential and perhaps fear misconceptions. It is apparent how Suzanne Haneef will underline the religious content of the circumambulation:

Moving in that sea of worshippers within the shadow of the Ka'aba, a deep sense of his smallness and insignificance comes to him, and all the trap-pings and defenses (*sic!*) of his ego fall away as he realizes that God alone is great and that none of his slaves can bring any of his worldly props and privileges with him to confront the glory and majesty of his Lord. Here, under the blazing sun of Mecca, making his circuits around God's Holy House as he repeats the solemn, moving supplications of the pilgrim, he comes face to face with his own nothingness, his creatureliness, his utter dependence on his Creator. (Haneef 1979: 54 f.)

The typical trait of this text is the emphasis on the general religious experience. The pilgrim goes around together with millions of other Muslims to feel a deep sense of smallness and 'utter dependence of his Creator'. Seven times of circle ambulation, three fast and four at normal speed, seems completely unnecessary for this feeling and those rules are also omitted in Suzanne Haneef's account.

According to ancient traditions the pilgrim shall press himself against the *multazam*, the wall in Kaba which connects the eastern corner and the door. This is of special sanctity and 'it is there the devout press their breast and outstretched arms against the wall to become impregnated with Baraka, the blessing virtue, that is imminent in the holy building' (Grunebaum 1988: 23). Pressing the right cheek to the wall, the pilgrims are saying: 'O God, O Lord of the ancient house! Save my neck from hellfire!' (Klein 1979: 168). There has obviously been a conviction among people in Arabia, before and after the time of Muhammad, that Kaba is a holy building and that a physical contact with the walls of Kaba will give health and happiness.

It is a view of life and the world that is typical of magical thinking and it is easy to understand that the authors of today regard it as superstition and avoid mentioning it. It seems to have been a general custom and it may still exist, but when it disappears from the manuals it will probably come to an end also in the practical accomplishment, as far as it has not already. Today the numbers of pilgrims are so huge that this custom is difficult to perform, but it is also very hard to combine with the conviction that the circumambulation is an expression of reverence for God and not for the building.

## The Black Stone

Muslim literature about *hajj* generally describes and discusses the importance of the black stone in the Kaba. The point is always to underline that the stone is of no religious importance (Lippman 1982: 26 f.). It is probably because non-Muslims (and perhaps also Muslims) have thought that the stone is holy in some way. That seems to be idolatry: 'The veneration of the Black Stone seems aberrant in a religion that professes to have avoided anything resembling idol-worship since the time of Mohammed' (Lippman 1982: 27, see also Mawdudi 1978a: 223). A book, distributed by the government in Saudi Arabia asserts:

Muslims in no wise (*sic!*) worship the Black Stone. They kiss or touch it because it is known that the Prophet Muhammed did so and thereby they establish a link between themselves and the Prophet. And he did so because it was a link between himself and Abraham. (Quoted from Lippman 1982: 27.)

The stone has only one task, according to today's scholars, and that is to show where the circumambulation shall start (Tabbarah 1978: 173; cf. Haneef 1979: 54). Several authors write proportionately too much about the Black Stone, obviously anxious to eliminate misunderstandings:

The Black Stone requires a particular mention on account of the many misunderstandings on its score. It is not a meteorite, but a black stone. Its practical importance is to show the starting point of the circumambulation, and by its colour it is conspicuous in the building. Secondly, this stone is not worshipped, nor even do Muslims prostrate in the direction of this stone, prostration being done towards any and every part of the building of the Ka'bah. (Hamidullah 1974: 72.)<sup>1</sup>

The stone is a very unremarkable stone according to this author, but Muslims have chosen to use it as a sign of the correct starting point of circumambulation. According to a hadith, the Black Stone has been regarded as the 'right hand of God' which might be interpreted as God's way to indicate the starting point of the circumambulation. That is why men can express their loyalty to God by touching it. That is one of the attempts to make new interpretations of the stone and excuses for kissing it. The Muslim scholars underline that there is no obligation to kiss the stone. They cannot prevent the pilgrims from kissing the stone—or at least from trying to do it—but they can create a new and more edifying interpretation:

The Muslims go to Makkah to glorify God, not to kiss a stone or worship a man or semi-divinity. Kissing or touching the Black Stone at the Ka'bah is an optional action, not an obligation or prescription. They kiss or touch or point to the stone only as a token of respect or a symbol of love for Prophet Muhammad, who laid the stone at the foundation of the Ka'bah

1 Observe the number of the paragraph, 181/a. The author has fitted it into later editions, probably because of questions or objections.



when it was reconstructed. That event has a special significance. It depicts Muhammad as a man dedicated to peace. (Abd al-Ati 1999: 98 f.)

Abd al-Ati then relates a story about a threat of civil war between chieftains in Arabia, caused by a fight about the honour of restoring the stone when Kaba was reconstructed. Muhammad 'decided to lay the Stone on a piece of cloth and asked the disputants to raise it together' (Abd al-Ati 1999: 99). They all accepted this Solomonic solution. Everybody was happy and Muhammad had once again proved that he was the model for a perfect human life. By means of this story about the background of the Black Stone, a beloved habit has been interpreted as an education in ethics. All suspicion of surviving superstition should be removed.

There are a lot of other traditions about the stone, its origin, history and importance. It is said that Abraham asked Ishmael 'to bring him a stone to fix it as a sign, from which people may start their circumambulation'. According to one tradition the Prophet Muhammad said: 'The Black Stone came down from Paradise whiter than milk, but the sins of Adam's offspring turned it black' (Tabbarah 1978: 173). It is also said that Muhammad venerated the stone because it had been touched by Abraham and Ismail:

The Prophet kissed it while circling the House, most probably because it was a trace from Paradise, or as a commemoration of the noble hands that carried it and placed it in its place, that is the hands of Abraham, the Grandfather of Prophets, and Ismail, the father of the Arabs. (Tabbarah 1978: 173.)

It is obvious from this text that every part of the *hajj* is used to repeat the content of the Muslim faith and worldview. The rites of Mecca shall create the connection between the original religion of Abraham and the revelations of Muhammad. All of them are situated in Mecca. Abraham is the most important prophet and Ishmael is called the Father of the Arabs. They prepare the ground for the Islamic message of Islam as the original and perfect religion of man. Two important parts of the pilgrimage are situated in Mecca, *tawaf* and *sa'i*. There is a difference between them:

While the circumambulation of the Ka'aba centres around God Most High, the centre of the drama of *sa'i* is man. *Sa'i* is symbolic of man's efforts and movements in life, of the human soul's ceaseless striving in his journey through the world, together with the host of his fellow human beings. The worshipper walks and during part of the way he may break into a run: seven

times between the two lava-rock mounds, which are situated about a quarter of a mile apart, glorifying and supplicating God. (Haneef 1979: 55.)

The rites of Mecca are intended to underline man's relation to God. The circumambulation around Kaba is according to this text mostly directed to 'God Most High', and the running between the hills is a symbol of human life, of 'the human soul's ceaseless striving'. So are heaven and earth, life and death, God and man all knit together and understood through the revelations of Prophet Muhammad, of the revelations he received in Mecca. It is not important to touch the Black Stone, to go around the Kaba or to run from Safa to Marwa. Only devotion to God is necessary. That is the message of pilgrimage. And it is worthy of notice that 'neither the Black Stone nor the Zamzam is mentioned in the Koran' (Hitti 1970: 38).

### The climax of the pilgrimage

The most important part of the pilgrimage occurs on one set day in the month, *dhu al-hidja*, the last month of the Muslim year. Pilgrims might come to Mecca at different times to perform *tawaf* and *sa'i*. 'The pilgrim should arrive at Mecca by the seventh day of the month' (Lippman 1982: 26). The rites of Mecca are not the most important parts of the pilgrimage, although it might seem so, because Mecca and Kaba are such important places. But the most important part occurs two Swedish miles east of Kaba, at a set time:

However, the climax of the hajj occurs on the ninth day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the day of Arafat. The prophet (peace be on him) stressed the essential nature of this day's observance by saying that one who has been present at 'Arafat would have performed hajj, signifying that even if a pilgrim arrived too late to perform the initial rites at the Sacred House, still, as long as he had taken part in the assembly at 'Arafat, his hajj would be accepted by God. (Haneef 1979: 56.)

From this text we can conclude that it is very important to be at Arafat together. It is obvious that the gathering of all the pilgrims in one place on one set afternoon has a special importance. Arafat is a vast empty plain, treeless and barren, surrounded by black lava peaks. The pilgrims are gathered there over a rather long time. 'The halt at Ararat' is described in the following way:

This is one of the basic rites of pilgrimage without which the Hajj becomes invalid, and the pilgrim's presence at 'Arafat should be during a specific period of time – from the noon of the ninth of *Dul Hijjah* till the daybreak of *Yaum Al-Nahr* (Day of Sacrifice). On this day, pilgrims come closer to God through supplication and earnest pleas. . . . At 'Arafat, one sees worshippers devoting themselves to God, asking forgiveness, displaying submission, performing prayer, and some weeping – as if the plain has turned into a sacred lake where people can wash off their sins and wipe out their misdeeds. (Tabbarah 1978: 177 f.)

The programme and timetable of the pilgrimage is partly free and partly prescriptive. The time for the 'standing', *wukuf*, on the Arafat plain on the 9th of Dhu al-Hudja is obligatory. No other day is permitted if you want to go to *hajj*. Millions of pilgrims move during the morning of that day from central Mecca to Arafat 'in order to spend the afternoon up to sundown engaged in penitence and supplication to God' (Haneef 1979: 56). They must be there at noon and they must not leave the plain until night has fallen. That means about six hours. After the pilgrimage, most Muslims agree that those hours are the most beautiful, impressive and overwhelming hours of their lives. This experience is motivated by the serious mood, the numbers of people in white clothes and the common attitude of reverence, submission and devotion. Suzanne Haneef writes:

During the afternoon up to sundown, all these human beings, assembled here from every land and belonging to countless races and cultures, are completely absorbed in supplication to God Most High, glorifying Him, affirming their utter helplessness and dependence on Him, and yearning for His forgiveness and His pleasure. (Haneef 1979: 56.)

It is obvious that the situation brings about a sense of dependency and reverence before the creator. Nobody can avoid this feeling when millions of Muslims are together at the same place. Surely they have all heard about the mood of Arafat from other pilgrims. The expectations are high. It is a very tense atmosphere:

The vast, otherwise empty plain is filled with. . . thousands upon thousands of pilgrims, tired and dishevelled and totally humble before their Creator, standing with hands raised in supplication, many weeping in the intensity of their awe and devotion to Him. Some climb up the Mount of

Mercy, a hill in the middle of the plain from where the prophet (peace be on him) delivered his last hajj address to his people. (Haneef 1979: 57.)

Many authors emphasize the solemn and impressive atmosphere during this afternoon. This atmosphere is obviously caused by the idea of the Last Judgement, which seems to preoccupy everybody. People stand in front of the Mount of Mercy and listen to sermons. It seems to be like the Day of Resurrection, when the world comes to an end; all men will rise up from the earth and be called to the Lord of the Universe. According to general opinion (See also the Bible, Rev. 6:11), they will also wear white clothes. The Austrian Muslim Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss) has written:

Hidden from my eyes in the midst of this lifeless wilderness of valleys and hills, lies the plain of Arafat, on which the pilgrims who come to Mecca assemble on one day of the year as a reminder of that last assembly, when man will have to answer to his Creator for all he has done in life. How often have I stood there myself, bareheaded, in the white pilgrim garb, among a multitude of white-garbed, bareheaded pilgrims from three continents, our faces turned toward the Jabal al-Rahma – the Mount of Mercy – which rises out of the vast plain: standing and waiting through the noon, through the afternoon, reflecting upon that inescapable Day, when you will be exposed to view, and no secret of yours will remain concealed. (Asad, quoted from Hamid 1990: 128 f.)

It is obvious that most pilgrims think of the Last Judgement in front of the Mount of Mercy. They are filled with respect, esteem, and confidence in anticipation of the Judgement. They are convinced that their experience during this afternoon is an anticipation of the expected day in the future. This might fill the pilgrim with an awe of the coming examination:

The gathering of 'Arafat brings vividly to mind the immense gathering of that awesome Day when men's bodies will be brought out of their graves and rejoined with their souls and all will stand in utter humility before God Most High to await His judgment, a time when no soul will have anything to bring with it before God except its inner state and whatever little good it may have been able to do in this quickly-passing life. (Haneef 1979: 57.)

They stand in front of the Mount of Mercy and a confident conviction of the merciful God seems to be the predominant feeling, or almost an obligation. It is said: 'The greatest sinner is he who stands on 'Arafat and believes that God has not forgiven him' (Tritton 1951: 28).

## The meeting of Adam and Eve

According to traditions, the Mount of Mercy is the place where Adam and Eve met when they had been expelled from Paradise. This is a controversial story, but some authors reproduce it without any hesitation:

After their fall from Paradise, Adam and Eve were separated and lost. They searched for each other, and by the grace of God met together at 'Arafat. In gratitude to God, the descendants of Adam and Eve turn to Him, make an effort to forget themselves and be assimilated with the Divine Presence, with a view to entreat His pardon for their shortcomings in the past and His help for the future. (Hamidullah 1974: 72.)

Western authors generally refer the old tradition about Adam and Eve at the Mount of Mercy when they describe the Muslim pilgrimage (Stewart 1995: 91). Abdullah Yusuf Ali has given an overview of the duties in his translation of the Quran. Among the duties are

. . .the visit on the eighth (day of Dhu al-Hijjah), of the whole body of pilgrims, to the valley of Mina (about six miles north of Mecca), where the pilgrims halt and stay the night, proceeding on the ninth to the plain and hill of 'Arafat, about five miles further north, which commemorates the reunion of Adam and Eve after their wanderings, and is also called the Mount of Mercy. (Yusuf Ali 1979: 79.)

There is no support in the Quran for the tradition about the meeting of Adam and Eve on Arafat and for that reason it is nowadays under debate. Many scholars avoid mentioning it.<sup>2</sup> Many Muslims are reluctant to accept this reformation of the holy history. They want to keep the connection between the first and the last day of the universe. The plain has been called 'Arafat before the time of Muhammad. The name means something like 'appear' and after

2 So for instance Waines 2003: 92 and Nigosian 2004: 111.

the revelation of the Quran and the establishment of the 'new' Islam, Muslims began to interpret the word with reference to Adam and Eve. They met and recognized each other there, having wandered around on earth after the expulsion from Paradise. Present authors try to oppose the belief by giving new and more credible explanations of the name Arafat. One author refers to modern scholarship:

Maulana Muhammad 'Ali of Lahore, famed Muslim scholar and authority, describes the place, saying, 'Arafa or 'Arafat is the name of the plain which is situated to the east of Makkah at a distance of about nine miles. It is derived from 'arf or *Ma'rifah*, which means knowledge of a thing, and *ma'rifah* especially, means *the knowledge of God*. The name given to this plain seems to be based on the fact that here men assembled together, as equals in all respects, are best able to *know* their God. (Tabbarah 1978: 177.)

This is the very example of the ambition to teach Muslim doctrines during the pilgrimage. The standing at Arafat seems to be more serious if all the history of the world is embraced. The verb 'arafa has a lot of meanings, all connected with knowledge and understanding. Muslims in general appreciate wisdom and prudence. The Quran glorifies God as wise and exhorts human beings to use their reason. Everybody will then realize that there is a God and that we are responsible to him on the Last day. The author asserts that human beings can never know their God better than when they are assembled together on the Arafat plain. That is exactly what the theologians want every pilgrim to learn from pilgrimage.

There is a kind of intensification in the pilgrimage: Adam and Abraham are connected with the first days, Muhammad with the time in Mecca and then the Judgement with the afternoon at Arafat. But this climax must also be used to tie together the important elements of the religion. So creation and revelation must also be connected with this solemn moment. Creation is introduced by the idea of Arafat as the meeting-place for Adam and Eve. Revelation is naturally associated with the place because this is where Prophet Muhammad 'delivered his last hajj address to his people' (Haneef 1979: 57). This sermon is regarded as a kind of testament:

When the prophet Muhammad performed his own hajj, a few months before his demise, he uttered then from above the *Hill of Mercy* (Jabal al-Rahman) a sermon which constitutes the charter of Humanity in Islam.

Some 1,40,000 [*sic!*] Muslims had come that year from all parts of Arabia, to listen to this testament of their Prophet. (Hamidullah 1974: 74.)

In this way a vault is built from the creation to the Day of Judgment, from the beginning to the end, and this total view of the world and the creation is present during the afternoon at Arafat, when millions of pilgrims stand in the hot sun in the desert. It might be easy to feel an 'utter humility before God Most High to await His judgment' (Haneef 1979: 57). When Muhammad started his preaching in Mecca, people could perhaps believe that there was only one God and that they ought to honour this God, but it was very hard to believe in life after death, and all the moral demands of the preaching depended on that point. It was necessary to stress that part of the message. It might be as necessary today. That is why Arafat is so important, to strengthen the central condition of Muslim faith.

### Stoning of Satan

Abraham and the reference to his life return after the climax of Arafat might be understood as a way to teach the pilgrims how to prepare for the meeting with the judge of the Last day. After Arafat the pilgrims shall advance to Mina, where they shall perform the 'stoning of Satan' by throwing pebbles on 'three stone columns representing Satan which have stood since ancient times in the village of Mina' (Haneef 1979: 57). According to some authors Abraham did this in order to drive away Satan and his temptations:

As to the lapidation of Satan, it may be recalled that when Abraham claimed to love God above everything else, God demanded of him as a proof the immolation of his beloved son. To add to this trial, Satan went first to Abraham to dissuade him from this resolution – and they say that this happened at Mina – but Abraham chased Satan away every time by pelting stones on him. Then he went to Hagar, and lastly to Ishmael himself; each one of them did the same. So one repeats the act symbolically, and resolves to fight diabolic temptations. (Hamidullah 1974: 72.)

But also this is probably an invention of those who want to give an edifying interpretation of the custom. The quoted author says that Abraham really threw stones at Satan and Western textbooks about Islam might refer to this custom without any further comments (Esposito 1991: 93). But most modern Muslim

books omit this element in their descriptions of the pilgrimage.<sup>3</sup> Some of them mention it but never say that Abraham did throw stones at Satan:

At Mina, Jumrat-ul-Aqba, one of the pillars representing Satan, is pelted seven times, each time with ALLAH-O-AKBAR (Allah is the greatest) said aloud. These pillars are erected on the site where Abraham was tempted by Satan against offering Ishmael as a Sacrifice in the fulfilment of his dream. (Chaudhry n.d: 10.)

It is a kind of disinformation to repeat the old descriptions of this custom when it is so consciously opposed by contemporary Muslim scholars. And that is in no way only modern or liberal theologians. Maulana Mawdudi, known as a leading figure in the 'fundamentalist movement' (Enayat 1988: 101), emphatically rejects the old tradition of Abraham's stoning of Satan:

It is generally said that this act of flinging stones is done in commemoration of the incident which happened to Abraham *i.e.* when he was about to sacrifice Isma'il, Satan attempted to beguile Abraham who flung stones on him. Or, it is said, that when a goat was given to Abraham as a *fidayah* for Isma'il, the goat ran away and Abraham struck it with stones. But in no authentic *Hadith* has been narrated from the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) that this is the background of *Ramiyay-jimar*. (Mawdudi 1978a: 225.)

Mawdudi tries to annihilate the idea about Abraham's stoning Satan. He obviously regards this as something completely impossible, unworthy the prominent prophet. He gives another explanation:

[The stoning] reminds of the destruction of that elephant army, which, in the year of the birth of the Holy prophet, invaded Mecca just in the month of Hajj, to demolish the House of Allah, and which, by the command of Allah, was destroyed by stone-raining sky-birds (Mawdudi 1978a: 225).

God can, according to Mawdudi, use the birds and stones to stop an invader, but Abraham is not a man who is throwing stones at Satan to evade his temptations. He has an inner struggle with the temptation and wins. Satan does not appear physically and flinging stones are not the way to drive him away.

3 See, for example, Tabbarah 1978, Sarwar 2003 and Abd al-Ati 1999.



This is also an example of the ambition to find something valuable in traditions to connect with the doctrines, always with the purpose to teach and educate. It is valuable to fight against temptations. It is interesting to note that God frightened away the elephant army. It is more valuable in the face of the Last Judgement to frighten away Satan and his temptations. That seems to be the reason why Suzanne Haneef accepts the old association between Abraham and the pillars, however she avoids the old story and just gives it a religious reason:

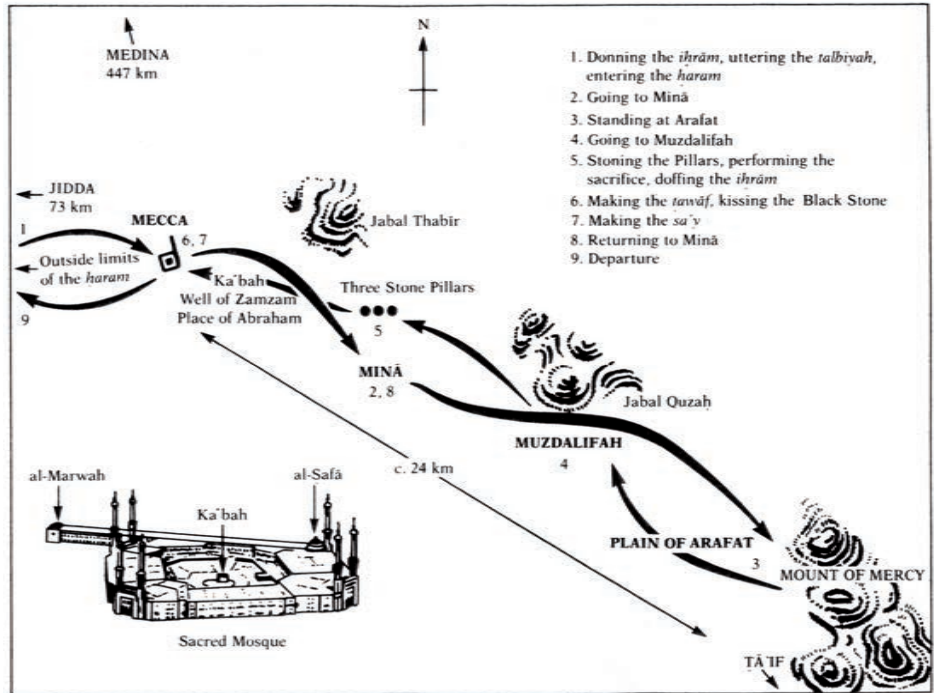
The stone pillars stand at the sites where Satan appeared to Abraham and Ishmael (God's peace and blessing be on them) in remote antiquity, tempting them to disobey God when Abraham was taking his son to be sacrificed at God's command. On each of the three days of sojourn in Mina, countless numbers of pilgrims go to the columns, stoning them with the pebbles they have collected to symbolize their rejection of Satan, in a stirring drama of the endless human struggle against evil prompting and temptations. (Haneef 1979: 57.)

### **Sacrifice of an animal**

The first day of stoning in Mina is also the first day in the Eid al-Adha (also written 'Idul Adha), the Feast of Sacrifice. It commemorates Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Ishmael (Sarwar 2003: 174). The pilgrims shall then make a sacrifice:

At this time, following the prophet's example and injunction, many of the pilgrims slaughter an animal in commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice of a sheep in the place of Ishmael; part of the meat is used to feed themselves and their group, and the rest is distributed among the poor (Haneef 1979: 57).

It is interesting that Suzanne Haneef writes that 'many of the pilgrims' perform this sacrifice, not all of them. There are also pilgrims who refrain from this part of the *hajj* tradition. It is obviously not obligatory, although we know that Prophet Muhammad really performed this sacrifice (Stewart 1995: 91 f.). It is perceived by the people that God wanted gifts such as animal blood and flesh; therefore this led to animal sacrifices. Who believes in this today? Should the sacrifice continue although the concept of God is different today?



Sketch map of major points on the *hajj* (Eliade 1987: 343).

According to the Muslim authors, the belief that Allah demands flesh is wrong and Mawdudi condemns those who (before the time of Muhammad) thought that: 'The blood of the animals was spilt on the walls of Ka'ba and the flesh thrown at its door with the idea that, (may God forgive) Allah demands flesh' (Mawdudi 1978a: 212).

Western scholars often describe this as a sacrifice without any further information and it is easy to draw the conclusion that God demands bloody sacrifices.<sup>4</sup> Muslim authors are anxious to interpret the sacrifice in an ethical and religious way:

In sacrificing such animals there is submission to God's command, and a demonstration of God's blessing by sharing the sacrifice with the needy. . . . The Sacrifice that Moslems offer during Hajj, reminds them of

4 See, for example, Nigosian 2004: 112 and Waines 2003: 92, where the distribution of meat to the poor is mentioned.

sincerity to God; it also carries a sense of thanksgiving to God for the ransom of Ismail. Through the salvation of Ismail there came the blessed line of descendents along which Mohammed was born. (Tabbarah 1978: 182.)

Suzanne Haneef thinks it is necessary to emphasize that the slaughtering of the sheep is not a sacrifice to God but is done in order for the meat to be eaten by perhaps starving human beings. It is an act of generosity. There are few virtues which are more valuable than generosity according to the Quran, so this distribution of food is something completely orthodox. The group of pilgrims and the poor in the neighbourhood should share the meat and in that way the sacrifice is interpreted as a symbol of economic equality. Hammudah Abd al-Ati is also anxious to emphasize that the sacrifice is not a gift to God but something else:

It is not the meat or blood of the sacrifice that pleases God. It is the expression of thankfulness to Him, the affirmation of faith in Him, and the remembrance of that historic event when Prophet Abraham was ordered to offer his son in sacrifice, an order which the father and son were ready to obey unquestioningly. (Abd al-Ati 1999: 101.)

Because this happens at a settled festival, Eid al-Adha, the sacrifice must be retained, but the interpretation should be more spiritually and morally educating. The ethical message is emphasised. The sacrifice is not obligatory, but when it is performed it is an expression of equality, generosity and solidarity with poor people. God needs nothing from us, least of all bloodied animals. In the time of *jahiliyya*, people might have thought that God wanted them as atonement. Muslims know that God forgives by mercy, not by human sacrifices.

## **Return to Mecca**

The pilgrims are then free to return to Mecca for circumambulation after the first day of stoning, but they can also stay in Mina for another two days. According to the tradition they are obliged to throw stones on the satanic pillars on the 11th and 12th of the pilgrim month. Men are shaved; men and women have their hair cut:

After the sacrifice the pilgrim's head is shaven, but women have their hair cut only slightly. This done, the pilgrim may discard the *ihram*. He is now freed from all but sexual restrictions. These are lifted only upon the pilgrim's return to Mecca, the third *ifada* of the *hajj*, on the same day as he is to perform a *tawaf*. He bathes and has himself sprinkled with Zamzam water before going back to Mina where he is to spend the nights of the eleventh to thirteenth of Dhu 'l-Hijja, the *tashriq*. . . . These days are devoted to eating, drinking and sensual pleasures. The pilgrim is free to dispose his time, except that he is obligated to throw each day seven pebbles at each of the three Devils. (Grunebaum 1988: 34.)

Muslim writers describe the rites after Eid al-Adha in other words. Some of the Muslim authors mention the shaving, but nothing about the social life and sensual pleasures. Nor do they describe the bath or the sprinkling with Zamzam water:

It is desirable to have haircut or shaving of the head after the Sacrifice, and to proceed to Mecca to perform the circuits of the Ka'aba again, and then return to Mina, where seven pebbles are thrown at each of the three pillars Jumrat-ul-Oola, Jumrat-ul-Wasta and Jumrat-ul-Aqba), one by one (Chaudry n.d: 10).

The sprinkling with Zamzam water seems superstitious and no Muslim author has tried to give it a spiritual interpretation, as a symbol of a purification of sin or something similar. The shaving is also possible to be misunderstood and that might explain why it is not always mentioned in the descriptions of *hajj*.<sup>5</sup>

The hair-cutting and shaving may be perceived as a hair-sacrifice, which is often the origin. In Ancient Israel sacrifice of hair was common and it is written about the Nazirite in the Bible that he shall 'shave his head. . . , take the hair which had been dedicated and put it on the fire where the shared-offering is burning' (Numbers 6:18). Also Apostle Paul performed a hair-sacrifice according to Acts 18:18. It is obvious that some Muslim writers avoid emphasizing the shaving and hair-cutting, probably for that reason. Sacrifices of that kind are a remnant from old times. They must be reinterpreted, but that seems more difficult and might explain why some authors have chosen to tone down the role of this rite. Suzanne Haneef writes: 'After the first day's

5 See, for example, Mawdudi 1978a: 225 and Hamidullah 1974: 72 f.

stoning, the pilgrim may shower and return to his ordinary dress, and most prohibitions applying in the state of ihram are now lifted' (Haneef 1979: 57). To take a shower sounds modern and healthy. The old-fashioned idea of gaining power from the water of a holy spring is changed to a lesson in personal hygiene and health care.

## The idea of pilgrimage in Islam

We have now followed the Muslim pilgrims through the rites of Mecca, Mina, Arafat and back to Mecca. It is time to summarize. What is the aim of the pilgrimage in Islam? The authors often repeat one purpose: peace. All Muslims are friends from their time of arrival at the pilgrimage and they have become even greater friends by the time of their departure from Arabia, after their visit to Mecca and Medina. According to Hammudah Abd al-Ati this is the first and most important purpose of *hajj*:

It is the largest annual convention of faith where Muslims gather to meet one another, study their common affairs and promote their general welfare. It is also the greatest regular conference of peace known in the history of mankind. In the course of *hajj* peace is the dominant theme; peace with God and one's soul, peace with one another and with animals, peace with birds and also with insects. To disturb the peace of anyone or any creatures in any way is strictly prohibited. (Abd al-Ati 1999: 97; cf. Tabbarah 1978: 175 f.)

This is a typical ideal of our time: peace and responsibility for the environment. It is also possible that it really is a contribution to peace, at least among Muslims. There are of course examples of this. Malcolm X has expressed it in the following way:

There were the thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and the non-white. (Hamid 1990: 128.)

But the opposite has also happened. Already in 692 Abd al-Malik's governor al-Hajjaj, led an attack against Mecca and set Kaba on fire (Afsaruddin 2008:

83 f.). Nadir Shah reigned over Iran as Shah from 1736–47. He demanded the Ottoman Sultan to erect at the Kaba a fifth ritual place for the Shi'is and asked him to appoint a pilgrimage leader for Iranian pilgrims travelling to Mecca by way of Damascus. The Ottoman government rejected all the proposals (Enayat 1988: 40 f.). In modern times there have been riots in Saudi Arabia and one of them started in 1979 with an occupation of Kaba. The government sent for French troops, which captured the Kaba with gas and a lot of violence. Hundreds of people were sentenced to death as punishment. Peace might be an important purpose of pilgrimage to Mecca, but it has not always been achieved.

The second purpose of the pilgrimage according to Abd al-Ati is to demonstrate 'the universality of Islam and the brotherhood and equality of Muslims' (Abd al-Ati 1999: 98). It is a problem that the pilgrimage takes place in a state with serious problems in the relationship between poor and rich. Some inhabitants in Saudi Arabia might experience a provocation when they see how poor immigrants must work for a low salary and how the rich élite will become still richer because of the pilgrims. But the *ihram*-dress and all the equal obligations of the pilgrimage might strengthen the feeling of equality, especially during the standing at Arafat. All Muslims stand immediately before their God in the same way as on the Last day and they anticipate the feeling of absolute equality and absolute righteousness in the Judgement, just as it is expected to be on that day.

The third purpose repeats and emphasises this trait of Muslim faith. Its aim is to confirm the commitment of the Muslims to God and their readiness to forsake material interests in His service (Abd al-Ati 1998: 98). As purpose number four, Abd al-Ati counts acquaintance with 'the spiritual and historical environment of Prophet Muhammad, so that they may derive warm inspiration and strengthen their faith'. The following two points are tightly connected with this. They shall 'commemorate the Divine rituals observed by Abraham and Ishmael' and lastly, the pilgrimage 'is a reminder of the Grand Assembly on the day of Judgement, when people will stand equal before God, waiting for their Final Destiny' (Abd al-Ati 1999: 98).

Among these six purposes of the *hajj* the confirmation of the Muslim's commitment seems to be the most important. Peace is perhaps the most urgent worldly and temporal purpose of the pilgrimage, although sometimes in vain, and it is often mentioned as the primary purpose (Tabbarah 1978: 175). But the result which is realised is the increased commitment and strengthening of the Muslim faith. This is due to the modern interpretation of and education about the pilgrimage. The pilgrims shall constantly repeat a prayer, called *talbiya*, which begins with the word *labbayka*:

The *talbiyyah* or the special refrain announcing man's willingness and eagerness to acknowledge and obey God resounds throughout the Hajj environment:

Here I am, O Lord, here I am! Here I am; no partner hast Thou; here I am!  
Surely to Thee is all Praise, all goodness and all Sovereignty  
No partner hast Thou! (Hamid 1990: 129.)

This prayer is repeated as a kind of mantra. It might seem mechanical and superficial, but authors of today regard this *talbiya* as a summary and central expression of the whole pilgrimage. It is an old tradition and used at every part of the *hajj*, but today it is especially used to increase the importance of the standing at Arafat at the expense of other rites during the *hajj*. This *lab-bayka* inculcates the relation of dependence between man and God and that relation is regarded as most manifest in the *wukuf*. The authors emphasise the fact that this standing must be the essence of pilgrimage as it is the only part which is obligatory and must take place at a set time. All pilgrims must stand there in the burning sunshine for six hours.

### **Pilgrimage as central rite**

Why has pilgrimage been a central part of Islam and counted among the so called five pillars? Of course it is a way to remember Abraham and repeat the pretensions of Islam to be the original religion of mankind and the restored religion of Abraham. The pilgrimage has always been used as a means of educating Muslims in the creed and content of Islam—and that message might change over time. For that reason the pilgrimage also presents a mirror of the current Muslim preaching and theology. In our time the message of Islam as the religion of reason and nature is important. It is emphasised in conscious opposition to old rites which might be interpreted as superstitious. It is necessary to underline that nobody knows if they ever have been perceived in that way, but this suggestion is at least implicated in some Western descriptions of the *hajj*. The suspicion is enough for the ambition of Muslim scholars to tone down the role of several elements of the pilgrimage.

Muslim pilgrimage is not only—and not in the first place—penitence and it is hardly a compensation for sins. It is a way to forgiveness and reconciliation, but it is above all the *Annual International Muslim Assembly* (Sarwar 2003: 74) and is used for education and demonstration of the Muslim creed, a confirmation of convictions about Islam as the eternal, universal, rational and

natural religion. It serves the same religious purpose as the mass meetings of revivalist movements among Christians. The environment and ecological prerequisites support the aim during the standing at the plain of Arafat during the appointed day when every pilgrim must be present at the same place, from noon to sunset.

The desert, the roof of heaven, and the heat combined with the memory of creation and association with the last Judgment make Muslims feel humble and submissive. It might be contributions to penitence: At 'Arafat, one sees worshippers devoting themselves to God, asking forgiveness, displaying submission, performing prayer, and some weeping—as if the plain had turned into a sacred lake where people can wash off their sins and wipe out their misdeeds' (Tabbarah 1978: 178). Many pilgrims describe the hours at Arafat as the most terrific experience of their lives so it is obvious that this penitence is the most impressive impact of the pilgrimage.

To a certain degree the pilgrimage is a denial of convenience but not overly so. It is of course a hard experience to stand in the sun praying and listening to sermons, but this mortification helps the pilgrims to feel that they really offer a sacrifice to God. Disabled people do not need to stand in the sun but may stay in tents. Nobody shall be tried over capacity. But the most evident result of the standing at Arafat is the strengthening of the Muslim faith in God and the Judgement. Four million Muslims stand for six hours with lifted hands repeating the expressions of commitment. The preaching of the Prophet is read from the Mount of Mercy, where people still believe that Adam and Eve met at the moment when Islam was brought to the earth. The creation and the destruction of the universe are knit together.

## Pilgrimage and the content of Islam

Let us now return to the statement of von Grunebaum, who declared that 'nothing in the doctrine of Islam suggests the *wuquf* in 'Arafa as the culmination of a specifically Muslim pilgrimage' (Grunebaum 1988: 35). He is completely correct in his statement that the *wuquf* in Arafat is the climax of the pilgrimage. He is completely wrong, however, when he thinks that the climax of the standing at Arafat is incompatible with what he calls 'the doctrine of Islam'. If there is anything which might be called 'doctrine of Islam' there is at least nothing which can be appointed '*the* doctrine of Islam'. Perhaps Grunebaum meant that the doctrine of Islam is a message about the revelations of Muhammad and certain rites prescribed in the Quran. Then it might



be a strain to regard the standing at Arafat as 'the culmination of a specifically Muslim pilgrimage' and more Islamic if the circumambulation around the Kaba was regarded as the most important rite.

Doctrines differ over time, however. For the moment, most scholars want to emphasise the doctrine of Islam as the original and natural religion of mankind. Nothing can then be more helpful in an education by experience in that creed than the experience of standing at Arafat. Today it is easy to see why standing at Arafat is regarded and emphasised by Muslim authors as the most important part of the pilgrimage. It is the most significant expression of man's situation as a human being between creation and Judgement. According to modern Muslim scholars Islam is the original religion of mankind.

The standing at Arafat has a symbolic importance. The sky is a symbol of God, creator and protector, on which all life depends. The Mount of Mercy reminds the pilgrims of Muhammad, who gave us the guide to a life according to the will of God. Millions of Muslims in white clothes show us the situation on the day of Judgement. That is also the reason why modern Muslims try to extinguish or decrease the importance of all customs which seem to reflect an old Semitic or Arabian religion, or at least everything which might be understood or misunderstood as superstition. It is valuable to visit Mecca because you can learn the story of Adam, Abraham, Ishmael and Muhammad. They are the most important prophets of human history. Every part of that story is told and interpreted in a timeless way, however, as an expression of a view of life, and not as events or incidents in past history.

During the pilgrimage people leave the milieu of their everyday life and spend some weeks in a completely different environment together with millions of like-minded people. The attitude and atmosphere might also be described in a more militant way:

The Ka'bah at Makkah is the spiritual center of Islam and the spiritual homeland of every Muslim. When the pilgrim reaches Makkah his feelings would be like those of a patriot coming home from exile or a triumphant soldier returning from a decisive battle. (Abd al-Ati 1999: 99.)

This seems to be a typical opinion about Muslim pilgrimage. It means a victory. The army of four million Muslims have defeated doubts and weakness. Mecca is their spiritual homeland but they also have a worldly home and return there as victorious, still more strengthened in their belief that their God is the God of the universe and that their faith is the universal religion. They are educated by a number of experiences and their belief in Islam as the su-

terior, perfect and conclusive religion is even more consolidated. They return home with the conviction that four million people cannot be wrong.

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## Changing Features of the Concept of Pilgrimage

### The example of the Mevlana's Museum in Konya

#### Pilgrim as a term

In religion and spirituality, a pilgrimage is a long journey or search of great moral significance. Sometimes it is a journey to a shrine of importance to a person's beliefs and faith. Members of many major religions participate in pilgrimages. A person who makes such a journey is called a pilgrim (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrimage>).

According to Fiona Bowie, the typologies of pilgrimage that have evolved are dependent upon the background and intentions of the writers (Bowie 2006: 246). However, we can create a typology based on destination, such as the destination goal, which is the sacred place. Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan also categorise the term of pilgrimage based on destination. They state that we can use five categories to explore further the nature of pilgrimage (Nolan & Nolan 1989: 325).

These categories are:

1. *Pilgrimage to a sacred place.* The pilgrimage locale may be a physical structure, such as a building or some other construction—for example, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, Graceland in Tennessee, or the Enfield football ground in Liverpool (Nolan & Nolan 1989: 325–8).

2. *Pilgrimage to a sacred person.* In some cases sanctity is related to a person. The Franciscan monk Padre Pio, who received the stigmata, attracted growing numbers of pilgrims to San Giovanni Rotondo in Italy (Bowie 2006: 247).

3. *Pilgrimage related to a sacred object.* Relics are an obvious example for this section. There are relics in almost every religion, and they have religious power. The pieces of the true cross, holy nails, the Virgin's breast milk and the burial clothes of Jesus in Christianity; Hırka-i Serif (Muhammad's cardigan), Sakal-ı Serif (Muhammad's beard) are some examples of sacred objects in modern times.

4. *Pilgrimage as a sacred text.* The idea of a pilgrimage being based primarily upon sacred text may seem strange, but this is one way of understanding Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land (Bowie 2006: 248).

5. *Pilgrimage as an allegorical journey.* According to Bowie, all of life and its struggles can be regarded as a journey towards perfection, with Heaven as the goal. Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic Sufi, and Christian traditions have all developed this ideal of the interior pilgrimage (Bowie 2006: 249).

## The meaning of travelling in Islamic culture

As in other civilisations and traditions, travel is an important phenomenon when considering changes in Muslim imagined communities. Within the Muslim doctrine certain types of travel, such as *hajj*, *hijra*, *ziyarets*, are encouraged and enjoined.

One of these is the express obligation to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca during a specified time, the *hajj*. As a term *hajj* refers to 'heading for God, being purified, to be rid of sins etc.' (<http://www.diyenet.gov.tr/turkish/default.asp>). 'Every Muslim, anywhere in the world, is obliged to perform, at least once in a lifetime, the *hajj*, or ritual pilgrimage to Mecca. Although the obligation is a conditioned one—the Muslim is not expected to perform the act if it exceeds his or her physical or economic means—it issues from God Himself, in His Holy Quran.' (Peters 1994: xxi.)

Another travel type is *hijra* which was a compulsory migration from Mecca to Medina. The difference of the *hijra* is that it was an exception in Muhammadan time, in order to escape cruelty and to extend Islam in 622. *Hijra* is the emigration of Muhammad and his followers to the city of Medina, marking the first year of the Islamic calendar (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra>).

The type of travel important to our study is *ziyaret*. Visits to local or regional shrines (*ziyaras*) and travel in search of knowledge (*rihla*) provide further examples of religiously inspired travel (Eickelman & Piscatori 1990: 5).

The saints whose shrines remain to be visited are seen as active personalities (*zat*), to whom respect is due because of the greater respect which they showed to God. Miracle stories tell of the saints' extraordinary qualities and it is believed that they have the power not only to punish disrespect but also to make positive interventions in the world of the living. (Tapper 1990: 247.)

## Change of the culture

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi says the following words in one of his quatrains named *Towards Innovation*:

How nice to migrate from somewhere every day,  
How nice to be somewhere every day,  
How nice to flow without blur and freezing, gone with the past my dear,  
No matter sayings exist in the past, now we need to say something new  
(Bal 2007: 166).

The change Mevlana emphasizes is actually the only rule/policy of life and culture that has not changed since the creation of the human being. Individuals and communities, tribes, states have come and gone, but cultures and civilizations protect their continuity through ongoing change. Change and continuity are perceived as opposite concepts, but this perception is wrong. Because the perception called 'continuity' (uninterruption) can be advocated to be realized only by the role of change or the process. Under constantly changing environmental conditions, those who do not change and do not keep up with these changes are lost in time. (Güvenç 2004: 25.) Accordingly, becoming increasingly diverse must be a basic feature of various societies to guarantee compatible interaction between groups and individuals with multiple, various, dynamic cultural identities and the ambitions of living together.

The concept of 'culture' was published in *Primitive Culture* by Edward Tylor for the first time in 1871. Tylor defines culture as follows: 'Culture is a complex body including information, art, ethics, traditions and other similar skills and habits gained by man as a member of society' (Burke 2006: 9). Culture in each community is different in content and its scope is mostly quite different. But the culture industry aims at mixing old and known things with new, as a form of a new feature. In all branches of this industry, the products are shaped by some people in order to be consumed by others; they determine the nature of consumption for large scales of people and products according to a certain plan. The culture industry integrates consumers deliberately. From this perspective, it is said that it has not actually done anything but alienated the society from its major culture by transferring cultural products. (Tarhan 2007: 180.) We can say that the nineteenth century was the time when cultural products started to be materialised. Thus, the 'consumer culture' class was born. Moreover, changes in the rich cultural values and the loss of national and local cultural elements—which are part of the effect of consump-

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi's tomb, the 'Green Tomb'. Photo <http://www.tmesimler.com/postcard.img3180.htm>.



tion culture—increase cultural uniformity; hence other problems caused by change of perception have emerged.

Here, the most important point to consider is the faith–culture–art–market relationship; this has to be balanced in a healthy way. Because today, the global economic system, in other words the consumption culture structure, affects everything from politics to economy, from individuals to society, from belief systems to cultural values and from human–society–culture–art relationships to all other areas that change our lives. The process of change in the world takes the shape of a transformational process. We can say that all of the changes and transformation processes experienced today give birth to some new and different concepts like ‘faith tourism’.

### **The relationship between faith and tourism**

Because of religion's big effect on travelling, tourism and religion are related with each other. Religion is a factor which canalises people to travelling. Religious buildings, rituals, spiritual festivals, beliefs and spiritual events are factors that cause people to the travel and direct them towards faith tourism.

Unlike other tourism types, people travel to sacred places to fulfil the sacred duties which are their religious obligations. Because worshipping is related to them, people travel to these places. (Usta 2001: 18.)

The number of people who travel to fulfil their sacred duties is constantly increasing, because religion is important for most people. Therefore the number of travelling people is increasing day by day and this creates a huge income for the tourism sector. (Herbert 2001: 312.)



Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi. Photo <http://www.sufism.20m.com/mesnevi.htm>.

To understand the importance of the relationship between religion and tourism, we have to understand the economic and sociological dimensions of religion and the effects of these on tourism. The economic dimension of religion on tourism has always charmed tourism investors, because people easily spend much more money for sacred duties as compared to ordinary travels. As a result of this, tourist business investments are moving into the faith tourism area. Nowadays tourism, which is an economic and aggregate event that creates serious cultural and political effects, has important consequences especially on international relationships. (Akat 2000: 24.)

People can reach some of their spiritual goals by the aid of faith tourism. We can summarize them as fulfilling spiritual entailments, accomplishing offered votives, being thankful, being satisfied in social and spiritual ways, getting in touch with other people who belong to the same religion, attending conferences about spiritual topics and so on.

### **The Mevlana Museum as an example in the context of faith tourism**

Founded in 1926, the Mevlana Museum is located in a structural complex, which was the Dervish lodge of Mevlana, in Konya. The campus, known as the tomb of Mevlana, is located in an area of approximately 6,500 square meters. Today, the total area has increased to nearly 18,000 square meters, after additions that were made at the end of the nineteenth century and additional territories that were arranged as rose gardens. The Mevlana Museum is the second highest earning museum among those under the supervision of the



Ministry of Culture. Particularly in 2007, designated the 'World Mevlana Year' by UNESCO, Mevlana was celebrated through several activities all around the world. The number of annual visitors exceeded 1.5 million people.

The tomb that was built on Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi's grave is called 'The Green Tomb'. The place where the Green Tomb is located used to be Mevlana's lodge. The west part of the lodge is surrounded by rooms of dervishes. There are three gates in the lodge. The western gate, which was used by dervishes, is called the 'Dervishan Gate'. The second gate is called 'The Garden of Soul', located in front of the 'Üçler (Triple) Graveyard'. And the last one is located in the northern side of the tomb, called 'Çelebi [degree, given to grand-masters of Mevlana order] Gate'.

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi was raised in the social and cultural environment of the thirteenth century, and the social and cultural events of that era influenced him deeply. Mevlana's father's faith in the Islamic system of mysticism, which is based on the Islam concept of *takva* (fear of Allah), influenced Mevlana's intact, pure soul towards itself. Starting from his early childhood, Mevlana reflected the scars inflicted on him, due to the mind movements of the culture that he lived in, as love poems; actually he was an interpreter of his own century's and society's problems. (Aydın 2002: 11-12.)

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi was born in Balkh in Khurasan in September 1207 as the son of Baha'al-Din Walad, a man noted for his learning and himself a Sufi. In 1219 Baha'al-Din fled with his family from Balkh because of the impending invasion of the Mongols. After several years of wandering, he finally settled in Konya in present day Turkey, where he occupied a high religious office and was given the title 'king of the religious scholars' (*sultan al-ulema*). At the death of Baha'al-Din in 1231, Jalal al-Din succeeded him in his religious function. Following in his father's footsteps, Mevlana became attracted to Sufism early in life and became the disciple of a number of spiritual masters. Perhaps the most important occurrence in his spiritual life was his meeting at the age of thirty-seven with a wandering Sufi named Shams al-Din of Tabriz. For the remaining years of his life Mevlana was a Sufi who radiated the intoxication of Divine Love. In addition to writing voluminously, he trained a large number of disciples, from whom was to stem the great Mevlevi order of Sufism. He died on 17 December 1273. (Chittick 2005: 4.)

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi was 22 years old when he arrived in Konya. He lived there until his death at the age of 66. The city afforded him the atmosphere and the opportunity to evolve and express his new ideas, which incorporated cultural values from the diverse religions and sects active in the Seljuk capital. He achieved distinction as a young theologian and Sufi. It

was in Konya that his philosophy engendered the Mevlevi movement or sect. Mevlana's ideas and ideals of spiritual purity, love and understanding, the aesthetic dimensions of faith, humanism, intellectual freedom and universalism found fertile ground and took root in the heartland of Anatolia (Halman & And 1983: 17). According to Irene Melikoff, Mevlana was a humanist, who invites people to the union of love. And this is his powerful side (Subaşı 2007: 155).

You are the example of God's secrets,  
You are the mirror of God's beauty,  
There is no subject aside from you in the universe,  
You are the one what you are looking for.  
(Halıcı 1986: 46).

However, for Mevlana the main issue is human. Religions, ethics and philosophies are just tools for making people happier. Loving God by seeing people and his other creations, by not blaming anyone, by not discriminating people as black or white, poor or rich, Christian or Muslim, by knowing and loving people just because of their humanity, in other words just because they are creations of God. (Subaşı 2007: 157)

Although Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi is a theologian, for Eva De Vitray Meyerovitch, he is a great thinker. She stated about him: 'Can you imagine that even in 13th century, he was teaching if you cut the atom you would find the core with planets circulating around it. He was definitely aware of atomic energy and warning us to be careful because crashing atoms can convert the world to ash.' (Subaşı 2007: 135)

## Data analysis

To determine the visitors' intention for coming to the museum, short surveys were made among domestic and foreign visitors who came to visit the Mevlana Museum. Our sample group was chosen with the random sample method. To provide quantitative equality, surveys were conducted on 20 domestic and 20 foreign visitors. Surveys were not conducted on crowded tourist groups, in order to provide national or local diversity.

The most significant feature of the survey was obtaining information in as short an amount of time as possible. The survey was conducted just before people entered the museum because participants had limited time, so the

questions were short; getting relevant information for our study as quickly as possible and not boring the participants was our primary goal.

The basic point of the survey was determining the visitor's intention with visiting the museum on a classification based on some features of the participants. Therefore, the participants were asked some purposive questions, such as their age, sex, nationality, place of residence, knowledge of Mevlana, previous visits to the museum if any, and their favourite part of the museum.

Eight of the domestic participants were women, twelve of them were men. The number of the foreign participants was the same.

**Dispersion of women and men among visitors.**

	Women	Men
Domestic visitors	8	12
Foreign visitors	8	12

**Dispersion among domestic and foreign visitors.**

Domestic visitors	20
Foreign visitors	20
Total	40

In question 3, the nationality of the participant was asked, to determine participants' profiles. Among the participants there were eight German, two Australian, Swiss, Canadian, North-American and Japanese each, and one French and a South African. We can say that the Mevlana Museum has a large scale of visitors from all over the world, but especially from Europe. However, it should be stated that not all of the foreign visitors to the Mevlana Museum are in Turkey only for visiting Mevlana or Konya. Package tours are provided especially for the Cappadocia area and both Nevsehir (Cappadocia) and Konya (Mevlana) are included in these packages.

**Distribution of the nationality of visitors.**

Australian	German	Swiss	Canadian	American	French	S. African	Japanese
2	8	2	2	2	1	1	2

In the fourth question it was asked where the visitors came from, in order to determine whether the domestic visitors were from Konya or elsewhere in Turkey. Only two of the visitors were from Konya. The rest of the domestic visitors can be named as domestic tourists, because they were in Konya just for visiting. When we look at the distribution of cities tourists were coming from there were five from Ankara, three from Istanbul and one from Kayseri, Mersin, Kahramanmaraş, Antalya, Trabzon, Adana, Hatay, Nevşehir, Bursa and İzmir. In general, Konya's geographical situation, located on intercity roads, affects the museum's visitors even when people do not aim to visit Konya or Mevlana museum at first. Most people have the time to visit the museum when they on their way to somewhere else. In addition, the numbers of visitors from adjacent cities of Konya can not be underestimated.

**Distribution of cities where tourists were coming from.**

	Konya	Other cities
Domestic visitors	2	18
Foreign visitors	–	20

When we look at the frequency of the visitors returning to the museum, it is more common for the domestic visitors. Only two of the foreign visitors stated they came to the Mevlana Museum frequently, and only one of the rest stated that he had come to the museum once before. It was the first visit for the rest of the 17 foreign visitors. Whereas five local visitors stated they come frequently, ten stated that they had come to the museum a couple of times before. Five of the local visitors stated that this was their first visit to the museum. As a result of these numbers, we can say that locals visited the museum more frequently. This is naturally related to the accessibility of the museum for these visitors.

**Frequency of the visitors returning to the museum.**

	First visit	Second visit or more	Frequent visits
Domestic visitors	5	10	5
Foreign visitors	17	1	2

Nevertheless, seasonal differences are observed both for local and foreign visitors. Especially in December, a tourism peak is common and the week follow-

ing December 19th—government and local places arrange activities, because this week is the most important season for the Mevlevi doctrine. December 19th refers to Mevlana’s day of death and it is also a blessed day, due to his convergence with Allah. Therefore, it is possible that so many people—local and foreign interested in the Mevlevi doctrine—prefer to come again especially at that time of year.

The odes on the sarcophagus in Mevlana’s tomb are related to death. However, the idea of death is combined with a reunion with God. Therefore death should be evaluated as happiness. Do not think that death is a separation, do not say goodbye to the dead ones. Death seems as death in this world; however it is a rebirth in the other side. (Halicı 1986: 115).

When we asked why they had come to the Mevlana Museum before, foreign visitors stated that the reason for visiting Mevlana frequently was Mevlana’s sacred personality. Seven local visitors mentioned this, too. On the other hand, six local visitors stated their main visiting area is Konya, and for this reason they come to the Mevlana museum, too. Only two local visitors gave as their reason that they were walking around with their guests. None of the participants stated that their visiting reason was in order to offer a votive.

**The purpose of the former visits.**

	Mevlana’s holiness	Visiting Konya	Guiding guests	Offering votive
Domestic visitors	7	6	2	–
Foreign visitors	3	–	–	–

These results show that it is a tradition to visit the Mevlana Museum. This tradition is seen in connection with almost every tomb, even if it is prohibited to be visited by law. However, we should say that the Mevlana Museum is not an exception, but precautions taken by the government is protecting the museum from false beliefs and superstitions. For instance, an elliptical stone sculpture created by Wolfgang Laib, a German artist, was abrogated from the Mevlana Museum’s garden in 1983, because the community believed that that stone had fallen from the sky and it had some healing features. The most common superstition about it is that if an infertile woman sits on the stone, she will have a baby as soon as possible. (<http://muze.semazen.net/content.php?id=00113>.)

Another question concerned professional help. We asked the visitors: ‘When you came here before, did you use the services of a tourism agency?’

Only one local visitor stated that she had done so. Fourteen local visitors stated they did not need help, they knew where to go themselves. Although the number of foreign visitors who came to the museum frequently was quite small, one of them stated (s)he did not need help. Another two people had used the services of a tourism agency.

**Need of professional assistance during previous visits.**

	Independent visitors	With tourism agency
Domestic visitors	14	1
Foreign visitors	3	–

Another question was whether the participants had acquired any previous information about Mevlana or not. Seven people among the foreigner participants said yes, three said yes but not in much detail, eight of them said they had got information just before coming to visit, via the internet or books, and two of them mentioned they would get information in the museum. We see the differences between local and foreigner visitors/participants. Eight local visitors said they had acquired prior information, five of them said they had information but not much in detail, and only two of them said they got the information just before coming to the museum from the internet or books. Six visitors said that they would get information from the museum itself.

**Previous information about the museum.**

	Acquired prior information	Acquired prior general information	Acquired information shortly before visit	Acquired information from the museum
Domestic visitors	8	5	2	5
Foreign visitors	7	3	8	2

The number of people who had visited other museums and historical places in Konya is as follows: fifteen people among the local visitors and twelve among the foreign visitors mentioned that they did not visit other museums or historical places. The number of people, who said that they had not visited any other museums yet, was one of the local visitors and five of the foreign visitors. İnce Minare, Sırçalı Mosque, Allaaddin Mosque, Karatay Madrasah and

**Visiting other museums or historical places.**

	Visited only the Mevlana Museum	Visited other museums later	Had visited other museums already
Domestic visitors	15	1	4
Foreign visitors	12	5	3

the Ceramic Museum were some of the other museums and historical places which were visited by four local and three foreign visitors.

The last question concerned the visitor's favourite part of the museum. According to the answers, it was understood that almost every visitor liked the museum very much. However, some parts of the museum were especially mentioned, such as the tomb section, the section of handwritten Qurans and the tomb's roof and doors. In addition, due to the meaning of being a Muslim, local visitors mentioned that they liked the music played in the museum (sound of reed flute) and the section of the *sakal-ı serif* (prophet's beard).

**Conclusion**

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi was a philosopher who influenced our era with his 'humanist' thoughts, his invitation towards everybody to friendship and brotherhood and his ideas about love and humanism. The museum, opened in his name in 1926 in Konya has been converted into a special place, describing Mevlevi's way of life, telling the history of the Mevlana Dervish lodge and exhibiting related works with religious historical values. This important Museum, attracting many visitors from all over the world, including Turkey, represents unique examples both in architecture and genuine works of arts from Seljuk and the Ottoman period.

Today faith tourism, emerging as a business sector, due to the increasing number of travelling people everyday, fulfils the space of the religious obligations related to travelling and also shows itself in religious aspects, not only pertaining to the major dimensions of a religion, but also by affecting all other religion-related rituals. The Mevlana Museum has become one of the places affected by the faith tourism. It has turned into an economic resource and become an important place for advertising Turkey, having visitors any time of year. Previously, the Sema ceremony (the whirling of dervishes is also called



Whirling Dervish. Design Ingrid Schaar, <http://www.sufism.20m.com/mesnevi.htm>.

a Sema)\* has been offered to viewers only in December, but today in certain restaurants after eating Mevlana, which is a name of meal (a kind of pita), the show is offered to customers, as a kind of talent show or movie. It has become a tradition to, before the show, to buy souvenirs popular among both domestic and foreign tourists: Mevlana sugar and Mevlevi bric-a-brac.

Today, we live in a world formed by the culture of consumption, thus in this respect Mevlana and the Mevlana Museum certainly present nothing unusual to the public; they blend economic elements with faith tourism. All over the

world, we can see innumerable examples like this; faith tourism gives new characteristics and meanings to old places. However, this does not mean that Mevlana's religious importance is decreased or totally lost. As we can understand from the visitors' reports, the museum still continues to stand without exposing any corruption through the years, owing to the thoughts of Mevlana about 'peace', 'divine love' and 'tolerance', which embraces humanity. The most important suggestion that is to be made by us for such an important place containing numerous kinds of cultural values is, that it must be maintained

\* The Sema represents a mystical journey of man's spiritual ascent through mind and love to 'Perfect'. Turning towards the truth, the follower grows through love, deserts his ego, finds the truth and arrives at the 'Perfect'. He then returns from this spiritual journey as a man who has reached maturity and a greater perfection, so as to love and to be of service to the whole of creation. Rumi has said in reference to Sema, 'For them it is the Sema of this world and the other. Even more for the circle of dancers within the Sema who turn and have in their midst, their own Ka'aba.' which relates Sema to the pilgrimage to Mecca, in that both are intended to bring all who are involved closer to God (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sema>).



and renewed on a regular basis and new exhibition styles must be given to the place, which suit world standards and fulfil the requirements of our era.

Come!

Come whoever you are.

Doesn't matter if you are an unbeliever.

Doesn't matter if you have fallen a thousand times.

Come!

Come whoever you are. For this is not the door of hopelessness.

Come.

Just as you are. (Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi)

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## Dracula Tourism as Pilgrimage?

### Pilgrimage and tourism

Several studies have been made of the connections between pilgrimage and tourism. The sentence 'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' by Victor and Edith Turner is one of the most quoted lines on the subject (Turner & Turner 1978: 20). Erik Cohen has stated, quoting Gilbert Dupont, that in modern mass-pilgrimage the actual behaviour of pilgrims is often indistinguishable from that of tourists (Cohen 1992a: 53). Juan Eduardo Campo argues that in the late twentieth century pilgrimage and tourism are seldom easily distinguishable and pilgrimage often invites tourism, while tourism entertains the possibility of pilgrimage experiences (Campo 1998: 53).

Tourism and pilgrimage have many things in common, especially in the modern age. Although pilgrimage is motivated by a religious basis, it still has characteristics which are not motivated by religion. The secular aspects of pilgrimage, such as, for example, the problem of finding accommodation, organizing the trip especially for a large number of people, the problem of food, eating and healthcare are the same as in modern mass tourism (Vukonić 1996: 137–8). Culture and heritage have become important elements in tourism. The World Tourism Organization estimates that they are a component in almost 40 per cent of all international trips undertaken. Because many pilgrim sites have also become secular heritage tourism sites, pilgrimage, religious tourism and tourism have also come closer to one another (Timothy & Boyd 2003: 1, 28–33).

Sightseeing can be viewed as a modern ritual and the tourist as a contemporary pilgrim who searches for authenticity in other times and places than his or her everyday life (MacCannell 1999: 13; Urry 2002: 9). Authenticity is a shared ideal between tourism and pilgrimage. A pilgrimage site should at least in some way be authentic to the pilgrim whether it is historically authentic or sanctioned as authentic by a religious authority (Schott 2006: 316). A pilgrim site has to be, or at least it has to feel, authentic in order for the pilgrim to really experience it. Although the need for authenticity in tourism is questioned and challenged by many scholars, it is nevertheless still an

important part of tourism.<sup>1</sup> However, the question of authenticity in tourism is not an easy one. In order to fully understand the role of authenticity in tourism we have to split the concept of authenticity into two: firstly the historical and scientifically measured authenticity and secondly the felt or experienced authenticity (Hovi 2008b: 85). Sometimes the tourist may have an authentic experience even though the surroundings might not be authentic in the strict sense of the term. In my opinion the feeling and the experience of authenticity is common both in tourism and in pilgrimage, whether the actual site is historically authentic or not.

According to Alan Morinis, pilgrimage 'is a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal' (Morinis 1992: 4). Pilgrimage can therefore be seen as existing beyond the original religious realm and having a meaning which allows secular journeys to be included. Pilgrimage can for example include travel to sites that symbolize nationalistic values and ideals, disaster sites, places related to the lives of literary writers and the settings of their novels, places associated with musicians and other known figures from popular culture, as well as places associated with historical persons and events (Olsen & Timothy 2006: 5). In his article about American domestic pilgrimages, Juan Eduardo Campo divides American pilgrimage into three categories: 1) pilgrimages connected to organized religion, 2) pilgrimage connected with American civil religion and 3) pilgrimage connected with cultural or implicit religion. According to Campo the third group comprises pilgrimages that incorporate elements from cultural values and practices but which are distinct from organized religions and civil religion. As an example Campo mentions Disneyland or Disney World and Graceland, the family mansion of Elvis Presley (Campo 1998: 44, 51).

Even though pilgrimage and tourism have a lot in common, not every tourist is a pilgrim and not every pilgrim is a tourist. However, it can sometimes be hard to find the distinction between pilgrims and tourists. There are places where pilgrimages have undergone a touristic metamorphosis and where the behaviour of quasi-believers cannot be characterized as very religious (Vukonić 1996: 138). At some pilgrimage sites the behaviour of some of the pilgrims is seen as less real than the behaviour of others. In their purchases, many pilgrims behave like tourists. For example in the famous pilgrimage site of Lourdes some of the pilgrims criticize other pilgrims who have bought mementos. The pilgrims who criticize others may also have implied

1 For the discussion about authenticity in tourism see, for example, Urry 2002, and Timothy & Boyd 2003.

that the purchasers, at least in this respect, are not real pilgrims because they are behaving just like normal tourists (Eade 1992: 28). Erik Cohen has made a distinction between tourists and pilgrims in terms of the direction of their journeys. Cohen uses Victor Turner's concept of the *pilgrimage centre*. The pilgrim journeys toward the socio-cultural centre of his or her society, while the tourist journeys away from it towards the periphery. Pilgrims are travelling toward the place or centre they believe to be sacred and where they can share the place with people who believe as they do. Tourists on the other hand are travelling toward the other and towards something different. Instead of the centre they are travelling to the margins (Schott 2006: 303). This distinction is not so clear when the centre is located in the socio-cultural and geographical periphery of the pilgrim's society and the pilgrimage will take up aspects of tourism. In these cases Cohen makes the distinction between a pilgrim-tourist and a traveller-tourist in terms of whether or not the destination is a pilgrimage centre of his or her own religion or socio-culture (Cohen 1992b: 49).

This article is about Dracula tourism in Romania and how it may be seen as pilgrimage. I will approach this connection especially through the place myth of Transylvania and through the status Transylvania has in Western popular culture. In this article I will approach the subject purely from a 'Western' point of view. By this I mean that in this article Romania, although a member of the EU and NATO, is treated not as part of the West but part of the East. This is due to the fact that in Western popular culture Romania and especially Transylvania have always been portrayed as the Other in relation to the West. Because the Western popular culture plays a significant role in Dracula tourism, I consider this point of view to be justified.

## Dracula tourism

Dracula tourism is tourism which is centred on either the fictional vampire Count Dracula, or the historical Dracula, a fifteenth-century Wallachian (i.e. an inhabitant of the southern part of modern day Romania) ruler called Vlad the Impaler. In Dracula tourism these two characters are often conflated, or sometimes even melded together, into one Dracula figure. This linkage between the historical and the fictional Dracula is and has been the basis of Dracula tourism in Romania, even though the linkage is vague at best and often also very artificial. The fictional vampire Count Dracula first appeared as the main character in Bram Stoker's book *Dracula* in 1879. Since then the

character has appeared in numerous books, movies, games, theatre plays and TV-shows. The historical Dracula, Vlad the Impaler, was a Wallachian ruler, a voivode who lived in the fifteenth century and was also known as Vlad Dracula. Vlad became famous in printed German and Russian stories as well as in the Romanian oral tradition about him, which were circulated around Western Europe and Russia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Many of these stories portrayed Vlad as a cruel madman and as a bloodthirsty tyrant. This was the case especially in the German versions. (Boia 2001: 226–9).

Because of Vlad the Impaler's infamy, it has been easy to connect him to the monstrous vampire of fiction. Especially a work of two American scholars, Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally, has promoted this connection. According to Elizabeth Miller, their book *In Search of Dracula* is still considered to be one of the primary texts of Dracula studies in spite of its flaws. It was not the first to suggest the connection between Vlad the Impaler and the vampire count, but it is considered to have brought the connection to a larger audience (Miller 2000: 180–1). In reality, however, apart from a few obscure references to historical events in Stoker's book, the only thing that Vlad the Impaler, or Vlad Dracula, and the vampire Count Dracula have in common is the name Dracula (Miller 2000: 188–9). Despite the artificiality of the connection, vampire Dracula and Vlad the Impaler have become synonymous in the media and in popular culture, and partly also in the tourism industry. In my opinion this is due to the position Dracula enjoys in Western popular culture. This is evident in Dracula tourism, where the name Dracula is often used of both Vlad the Impaler and the fictional vampire count. Because the connotations between the name Dracula and vampires are so strong, tourists may automatically think of the vampire even when actually hearing about Vlad the Impaler (Hovi 2008a: 83).

An essential part of Dracula tourism consists of the Dracula tours. These tours visit locations somehow linked to either one of the Draculas. Dracula tours can be divided roughly into three different types: 1) tours that concentrate on the life of Vlad the Impaler and the historical sites connected with him, 2) tours that concentrate on the fictional vampire Count Dracula and locations connected with Bram Stoker's book, and 3) tours that mix both the fictional Dracula and Vlad the Impaler. Sites connected to Vlad the Impaler include, for example, the assumed birth and burial places of Vlad; the city of Sighișoara and the monastery at Snagov. Other sites include the cities Bucharest and Târgoviște where Vlad lived and ruled, and the two castles connected with him, Bran and Poienari. The sites connected strictly to Bram Stoker's book include only two places, the city of Bistrița and the Hotel Castle



Sighișoara. A figure of the vampire Dracula outside the house where Vlad the Impaler is thought to have been born. Today the house is a restaurant called 'Casa Vlad Dracul'.  
Photo © Tuomas Hovi 2010.



Transylvania. The Carpathian Mountains near the border to Wallachia. Photo © Tuomas Hovi 2010.

Dracula which is built in the general location of Dracula's castle in Bram Stoker's novel. In addition to these two, the whole region of Transylvania can in a way also be seen as a 'Dracula site' (Hovi 2008a: 73–4).

### **The place myth of Transylvania and Dracula tourism**

When Bram Stoker published his novel he sealed the place myth of Transylvania. A place myth is a set of place-images which hold various discrete meanings associated with real places or regions, regardless of their character in reality. These place-images result from stereotyping and they may be accurate or inaccurate (Shields 1991: 60–1). Towards the end of the nineteenth century Transylvania had already been described as a supernatural and a backward part of Europe by writers like Emily Gerard and Jules Verne, but it was Bram Stoker's *Dracula* that made the most significant contribution to the place myth of Transylvania (Light 2008: 8). Because of the success of *Dracula* and its influence on popular culture ever since, Transylvania has become known as a land of superstition, vampires and myths, an 'in-between' place that holds a unique position in Western popular culture. In the Western popular imagin-



ation Transylvania has become synonymous with the supernatural. In a way Transylvania is an anomaly—it is a part of modern and rational Europe, and at the same time it is not. Transylvania can also be seen as a liminal space; it is somewhere between the known and the unknown worlds, between the past and the present and between the sacred and the profane realms. The journey to Transylvania can be seen as a metaphorical crossing of an imagined spatial or temporal threshold (Light 2009: 188; Pritchard & Morgan 2006: 764). This image of Transylvania is so strong that many Westerners think that it exists only in the minds of fiction writers and film-makers and express surprise when they learn that Transylvania actually exists as a real region (Hupchick 1995: 49). In the Western imagination Transylvania, as well as the whole of Romania, has become the home of the vampire Count Dracula, Dracula's country.

In addition to popular culture, the tourism industry also uses and upholds the place myth of Transylvania. Many travel agencies use the 'Transylvania discourse' in their advertising and tour itineraries. By 'Transylvania discourse' I mean the images and stereotypes that are being used in describing Transylvania as a magical, mystical, mysterious and terrifying place (Hovi 2008a: 76–7). The 'Transylvania discourse' is used differently by different travel agencies. In some cases the 'Transylvania discourse' is only hinted at and in some cases it is blatantly obvious. For example, in a tour itinerary from a travel agency called 'Company of Mysterious Journeys' it is stated that the traveller can spend the first day safe because he or she is still in Wallachia. It is only on the second day that the tour reaches Transylvania.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand a tour itinerary by a travel agency called 'Beyond the Forest' states that the traveller should remember that Transylvania is 'a land of myths, superstitions and the omnipresent feeling of danger'.<sup>3</sup> Although Dracula tours are offered through out the year, the season of Halloween is the most fascinating. Most of the travel agencies that organize Dracula tours have special Halloween-themed Dracula tours. These tours also visit locations connected to both the historical and the fictional Dracula, but the emphasis is on vampires and the horror aspect of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Many Dracula tours and especially the Halloween tours include some sort of performance at some point of the tour. In some performances the tourists are only observers as, for example,

2 Company of Mysterious Journeys. *Weekend with Dracula* [online]. [http://www.mysteriousjourneys.com/dracula\\_tours/long\\_weekend\\_dracula/](http://www.mysteriousjourneys.com/dracula_tours/long_weekend_dracula/) (accessed on 26 June 2009).

3 Beyond the Forest. *Ultimate Halloween* [online]. <http://www.beyondtheforest.com/Romania/DRACUH.html> (accessed on 26 June 2009).

in watching a witch trial or a vampire hunt. In some performances the tourists are also participants as, for example, in a Halloween costume party.<sup>4</sup> The elements of fantasy, escapism and play are important parts of Dracula tours and especially of the Halloween tours.

Dracula tourism, especially through the place myth of Transylvania, offers the traveller a chance to experience something that is seen as being lost in the secular modern West. The place myth has depicted Transylvania, and maybe the whole of Romania, as the complete opposite of the so-called civilized and rational Western world, in other words it is viewed as the *Other* in relation to the Western world. The images of Transylvania in Stoker's book and in nineteenth-century Western Europe were the projections of Western fears onto the East (Andras 1999: 2, 8). In Stoker's book and in Western European nineteenth-century literature, Transylvania was depicted in much the same way as today, but the attitude towards it seems to have changed. In Stoker's book modernization, rationality and technology are seen as admirable and the lack of it as negative. The modern image of Transylvania and the attitude towards it seems to be quite the opposite. Transylvania is seen as a mysterious and interesting place where Western progress and rationality have not yet been able to influence or even corrupt it. Modernization, rationalization and technology are seen as something negative. Although Transylvania is still also connected with vampires, evil and horror, it is regarded as fascinating rather than forbidding. This is part of a larger trend in tourism that is especially clear in the Middle Ages tourism boom. According to Lotten Gustafsson, the Middle Ages and medieval man have become the symbolic carriers of everything that has been lost or rejected in modern times (Gustafsson 2002: 269). The Dracula tourist can be seen as taking the trip to experience something deeper and special, something that has been lost or rejected in his or her everyday life surroundings.

### **Dracula tourism as pilgrimage**

Referring to the earlier definition of pilgrimage by Alan Morinis as a journey to a place that the person believes to embody a valued ideal, I would suggest that Transylvania is such a place (Morinis 1992: 4). As stated above, Transylvania

4 Transylvania Live. *Halloween in Transylvania with Vlad the Impaler* [online]. <http://www.dracula-tour.com/romania-travel-transylvania/halloween-dracula-tour.html> (accessed on 16 July 2008).

holds a special place in Western popular culture. Through the place myth of Transylvania many Westerners share the idea of Transylvania as both a mysterious, magical and supernatural place, as well as a land untouched by modern Western progress. This idea of a mysterious, time-forgotten place is a shared and valued ideal, especially for those under the influence of Western popular culture. Through the place myth, Transylvania has become a place of shared ideals that attracts many tourists. There are, however, many different motivations behind Dracula tourists' participation. Some tourists seek the literary roots of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, some the supernatural roots of Dracula and the vampire phenomenon, and some tourists take part in Dracula tours just for fun and general interest. Duncan Light interviewed a group of twenty-one tourists who took part in a Dracula tour during the Halloween of 2004. Most of the interviewed tourists had a preconceived image of Transylvania as a place which is something special or something extraordinary. To them Transylvania was a place that embodied a valued ideal of being special and more than the mundane existence in the modern Western world. One participant stated that she did not actually believe in the supernatural, but could still get enjoyment from it and the pretence that supernatural phenomena exist. There was also a costume party included in the Dracula tour that Light examined (Light 2009: 192–4). The costume party or 'Vampire Ball', which is a part of many Dracula tours, seems to be almost a shared ritual in which the participants dress up and behave according to a shared ideal. It is a 'ritual' wherein one can relax and leave one's inhibitions and restrictions behind, or in fact leave reality behind for an evening, as the participants themselves described the event (Light 2009: 194).

In Dracula tourism Bram Stoker's book obviously plays an important role. Many Dracula tourists go to Romania and Transylvania to find the literary roots of Dracula. These tourists want to visit 'literary places', places associated with writers' biographies, or those which provided the settings for their novels. Literary places are the fusion of reality and fantasy where the boundaries between imagined worlds and real life get blurred. David Herbert has made an analogy between literary tourists and religious pilgrims. He argues that the issue of real and imagined is very relevant in both (Herbert 1995: 33). Literary tourists are actually often called literary pilgrims, people who are prepared to travel long distances in order to experience places linked with writers and their work (Herbert 2007: 102). Pilgrim sites are usually seen as part of a sacred geography. According to James J. Preston, pilgrimage sites are often found in dramatic locations, or places that are located at the crossroads of previous civilizations that have been transformed and synthesized



Hotel Castle Dracula build in the general location of the Count Dracula's Castle in Bram Stoker's novel. Photo © Tuomas Hovi 2010.

many times by saints or prophets (Preston 1992: 35). Transylvania can also be seen as a part of a sacred geography through the idea of the place myth of Transylvania. This geography is, however, as much a part of imagination as it is real because it is derived from fiction. It is not physical geography but imaginative geography (Light 2008: 14).

Eric Cohen has made a distinction between a tourist and a pilgrim in terms of the socio-cultural meaning of the journey's destination. The pilgrim journeys toward the socio-cultural centre of his or her society, while the tourist journeys away from it and towards the periphery. Dracula tourism is interesting because it can be seen both as moving towards the centre and away from it depending on how the socio-cultural centre is defined. If we define Western popular culture as the socio-cultural centre, then Dracula tourism can be seen as a form of pilgrimage. Then again, Dracula tourism can also be seen as a journey to the periphery, or to the margins of the normal surroundings of the traveller, towards the Other of the socio-cultural centre. In my opinion, in Dracula tourism Transylvania, especially through the place myth of Transylvania, can be seen as being a part of the socio-cultural centre of Western popular culture. This Transylvania is as much a place of imagination as it is real and existing. Dracula tourism as travel to the periphery and to the margins can be explained with historical and socio-political reasons as well

as through the horror aspect. Romania and Transylvania can be seen as being on the periphery, or representing the Other to the Westerner because of the 50 years of the country's communist regime. During this time Romania was somewhat isolated from the West. Romania, Transylvania, and especially the novel *Dracula*, have from time to time been connected to the Balkans and to the discourse of Balkanism. Unlike Orientalism, which is a discourse about the opposition between East and West, Balkanism is a discourse about the ambiguity of the whole of south-eastern Europe which is situated at a crossroads between East and West. According to Maria Todorova, the Balkans represent the Other within Europe (Light 2007: 749; Todorova 1997: 15–17, 188).

According to Erik Cohen, although many pilgrim centres can be visited throughout the year, most of them have seasons, during which the pilgrimage is most meritorious (Cohen 1992a: 56). Here we may find another parallel in Dracula tourism. Although Dracula tours are offered throughout the year, Halloween seems to be a special season for Dracula tourism, as noted earlier in this article. Because Halloween itself is associated with horror and the liminality between life and death, it provides a perfect setting, not only of a particular time but also of a state of mind. Halloween can almost be seen as a portal or a gateway from mundane existence to the supernatural, from the profane to the sacred. In her research about the Goddess movement, Kathryn Rountree has stated that a Goddess pilgrim's visit to an ancient pagan temple is not only a journey to a distant place but also an imagined journey to distant time. The site visited provides a constant link between the past and present worlds (Rountree 2006: 45–6).

Visiting Transylvania, 'the land that time forgot',<sup>5</sup> the traveller may experience an imagined journey not just to a distant land, but also to a distant time. The aspects of time and history are also interesting in Dracula tourism because of the somewhat anachronistic relationship between the historical and the fictional Dracula. Vlad the Impaler lived and died in the fifteenth century, whereas Bram Stoker's book is set at the end of the nineteenth century. In a way the travellers go through different times as well as different places during the Dracula tours. Many Dracula tours and especially the Halloween Dracula tours start in Bucharest, then show sites connected to Vlad the Impaler in Wallachia and Transylvania before visiting the places associated with Bram Stoker's book, namely Bistrița and the Borgo Pass. While visiting sites asso-

5 Tours and Events. *Summer Dracula Tour* [online]. <http://www.toursandevents.com/2005%20Haunted%20AttractionDrac%20Itinerary.htm> (accessed on 1 July 2009).



Hotel Castle Dracula in the Borgo Pass. Photo © Tuomas Hovi 2010.

ciated with Vlad the Impaler, the tour guides usually tell stories about Vlad that relate to those sites. For example, in the ruins of the Poienari fortress, tour operators tell how Vlad's wife threw herself into the river below while the enemy was approaching, or how the treacherous landlords were forced to build the fortress.<sup>6</sup> Other similar sites include, for example, Sighișoara where Vlad is believed to have been born and Târgoviște where Vlad lived and ruled. In Sighișoara one can 'Stroll around the streets of the old citadel, just like Vlad Dracula did once, hundreds of years ago' or have dinner in 'the very place where Dracula was born.'<sup>7</sup> By visiting such sites the tourist can get closer to the historical Dracula and even relive the events. Similarly, by visiting the sites believed to be scenes of the life of a religious founder, the pilgrim relives those events in imagination (Turner & Turner 1978: 33). Here we find the common thread of authenticity. To visit the same authentic place where the religious founder, or in the case of Dracula tourism, Vlad the Impaler has been, enhances the experience of authenticity.

6 See, for example, Quest Tours & Adventures. *Dracula: Myth and History* [online]. <http://www.romtour.com/DRACULA-MYTH-AND-HISTORY.htm> (accessed on 9 July 2009).

7 Travel Library. *Dracula Tour Vampire In Transylvania* [online]. [http://www.travel-library.com/tours/europe/romania/brasov/dracula\\_tour\\_vampire\\_in\\_transylvania.html](http://www.travel-library.com/tours/europe/romania/brasov/dracula_tour_vampire_in_transylvania.html) (accessed on 9 July 2009).

The sites associated with Bram Stoker's book seem to be the highlight or the turning point of the Dracula tour. After these sites the tour usually continues for a few more days visiting historical and cultural sites before the end of the tour and the departure back home. The itinerary of the pilgrim is not only a simple geographical route, but also a symbolic ascent from the profane daily existence to the sacred. In a similar way we may say that the Dracula tourist follows a symbolic itinerary from the profane to the sacred as he or she travels from the historical Wallachia and Transylvania to the mystical and supernatural Transylvania, from the profane to the sacred, or at least from the profane to the supernatural.

## Conclusion

Dracula tourism and pilgrimage share some common features. Both pilgrimage and Dracula tourism have seasons in which the journey is more meaningful and they both share a sacred geography or sacred places. The most important aspect of Dracula tourism when linking it to pilgrimage is the place myth of Transylvania. Transylvania has become something much more than just a



The house in Sighișoara where Vlad the Impaler is thought to have been born. Photo © Tuomas Hovi 2010.

historical province that has been a part of Romania since 1918. Transylvania has become a mystical and a mythical land, almost a utopia. At the same time it is also a 'normal' part of a modern country where people live their everyday lives. The place myth of Transylvania provides a common and shared valued idea of a mystical and almost a sacred place untouched by modernity. This idealistic and romanticized vision combined with the idea of vampires, horror and the supernatural makes Transylvania a pilgrimage site for those who seek it. In Dracula tourism the boundaries between imagination, reality and experience are blurred. The experience of the tourist can be compared to the experience of a pilgrim. By seeking the historical, literary or the supernatural roots of Dracula, the tourist can be viewed as seeking some kind of a higher or deeper experience than just a 'normal' tourist experience would be. Although Dracula tourism can be examined in terms of pilgrimage, not all of the tourists can, or even should be, seen as pilgrims. Pilgrimage nevertheless offers a new and interesting point of view in researching Dracula tourism.

When thinking about Dracula tourism as pilgrimage the emphasis is on the fictional Dracula and the places attached to him and not on the historical Dracula, Vlad the Impaler. Although interest in Vlad the Impaler and the historicity of his life is growing, the fictitious vampire is still the main attraction in Dracula tourism. The connection to fiction is even greater when the two characters are combined into one character. In these cases the historical Dracula Vlad the Impaler is linked to a supernatural being, the vampire Dracula. This in a way gives legitimacy to the fictitious figure.

Although we may argue that tourism and pilgrimage have become almost indistinguishable, there are still differences between them. We may argue that there are pilgrims who act more like tourists than actual traditional pilgrims. At the same time, not every tourist can be viewed as a pilgrim. In my opinion it all depends on the person who is taking the trip, whether he or she is a pilgrim searching for something deeper and meaningful or is just looking for a good time. Whether or not the traveller thinks of herself or himself as a pilgrim and whether it is possible for an outsider to label the traveller as a pilgrim depends, in my opinion, on two things; first, on the reasons for the travel and second, on the preconceived ideas that the traveller might have about the destination. So a Dracula tourist can be a Dracula pilgrim searching for the supernatural in mystical Transylvania, or, a Dracula tourist can be just that—a Dracula tourist.



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## Embracing Complexity

### The post-secular pilgrimage of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt

In the summer of 2009, I visited Santiago de Compostela—not as a pilgrim, but in order to take part in an international conference in the field of the sociology of religion. For a researcher of religion visiting this widely popular destination for religious travellers, the issue of pilgrimage nevertheless seemed topical and thought-provoking, and I therefore decided to take part in a conference session entitled ‘Pilgrimages Today’.

During this seminar, I was introduced to an international research project called ‘The Pilgrimage Project: A study of motivations and experiences in sacred space’, headed by Dr Miguel Farias at the University of Oxford. Within this interdisciplinary project, Christian and pagan pilgrims in Europe were compared. The researchers had collected questionnaires and conducted interviews with persons taking part in pilgrimages, either to the predominantly Catholic sites of Lourdes in France and Fátima in Portugal, or to the neo-pagan sites of Stonehenge and Glastonbury in England. A particularly interesting aspect was the discussion on spirituality in this vast empirical material. It turned out that a majority, both among those taking part in traditional Christian pilgrimages and among those participating in the neo-pagan rituals, preferred to call themselves spiritual rather than religious.

So far, the research team had not made any further analyses of how the term spiritual was applied in the material and if, perhaps, there was a significant difference between the ways in which spirituality was understood within a Christian frame of reference and within a pagan one. What was clear, however, was that the persons who undertook pilgrimages placed great value on personal development, emotional experiences of a divine nature, holistic health concepts uniting body, mind and soul and—more generally—of finding oneself and finding a deeper meaning in life. The physical and ritual process of becoming a pilgrim seemed to satisfy the need for a comprehensive experience linking age-old traditions with personal development and uniting a bodily and spiritual effort into a tangible and meaningful experience.

Such perspectives are often recognised as characteristic for the post-secular culture we are said to live in, where the notion of spirituality is gaining in popularity over the traditional language of religion, including institutional leadership, doctrines and formal organisations. The description of the contemporary spiritual seekers awoke my immediate interest as I could sense a kinship with the worldview and existential outlook of a person whose spiritual journey I have lately been following closely: the novelist and playwright Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt. His spiritually inspired worldview is also the result of a pilgrimage, I claim, but this travel is of a more personal nature, starting with a powerful spiritual experience during a walking tour in the desert, continuing through inner contemplation and study and ending in an authorship dedicated to spirituality, interreligious encounters and human complexity.

In this article, my aim is to elaborate further on the notion of post-secularity, the themes and trends included in its scope, and its implications for the understanding of pilgrimage today as a complex phenomenon uniting ancient traditions and contemporary spiritual currents within a more or less flexible frame of ritualised and emotionally saturated conduct. In this analysis, the biographical notes of Schmitt's personal journey towards spiritual maturity and the inter-religiously inspired themes of his current authorship function as the empirical focal point of, as well as the kaleidoscopic lens through which, the topic as such is presented.

### **Post-secular spirituality**

The forms and functions of religion in contemporary society are said to be undergoing change. Several overarching processes at social, political, economical and cultural levels have altered the way religion is understood and employed in the everyday life of practising believers, spiritual seekers and antagonists of religion alike. Among these, we find the complex phenomenon of globalisation which affects practically all spheres of society and involves a high degree of mobility, migration and urbanisation (Martikainen 2007: 375). On a political and economical level, neo-liberalism as an all-encompassing ideology is gaining ground, celebrating the individual and her subjective right to choose her own lifestyle and worldview and increasing the impact of consumer culture and various media landscapes. Taken together, these trends imply an ongoing transformation of Western societies towards a greater diversity of ideas, values and practices (Furseth 2006: 302).

For many researchers looking into the global religious landscape of today, it seems obvious that the scholarly predictions introduced some decades ago concerning the slow decline, or even death of religion through the processes of secularisation have not been fulfilled. Long-established forms of religious life—for example, traditional religious institutions advocating sets of fixed creed and conduct—are indeed showing a downward trend, but the vivid interest in and practice of religion in new, innovative ways seem to give the phenomenon a character of expansion rather than erosion. Several scholars therefore question the secularisation thesis as such and argue that religion has not, after all, lost influence and relevance in contemporary society (Barbato & Kratochwil 2008: 1, 6). The trend of revitalisation is exemplified by numerous forms of religious practice that rapidly gain in popularity today: immigrant religions, charismatic movements, new religious movements, health and body practices as well as alternative spiritualities, to mention a few.

In order to create a theoretical account of the new situation at hand, the philosopher Charles Taylor elaborates on the term 'post-secular'. In his opinion, the grand narratives of secularisation must be disputed: not because the process has been reversed so that we are returning to the religious landscapes of earlier generations, but because 'we are just at the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no one can foresee' (Taylor 2007: 534–5). Thus, efforts must be made to analyse and conceptualise the new religious situation—after secularisation. It is not easy to give an unambiguous definition of this condition, however: depending on the focus and interest of the researcher, many contrasting—and even contradictory—processes of change can be included in its orbit (Barbato & Kratochwil 2008: 12). Hence, the following description focuses on transformations that bear the most profound implications for the current analysis.

The notion of spirituality has gained a fairly well-established place within the discussion on contemporary culture and society as a symbolic repudiation of and counterpart to 'organised religion' (Sutcliffe 2003: 223). The popularity of the notion is, according to Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, explained by the so-called 'massive subjective turn of modern culture', which is a turn away from institutional hierarchies, duties and objective roles and towards a life directed by one's own subjective experience (Heelas & Woodhead 2005: 2–4). The rapid rise of so-called alternative spiritual movements during the last century popularised the idea of religiosity as a personal quest for inner transformation and of the self as a seeker in novel and fascinating inner landscapes. Spirituality, hence, developed into a concept denoting a turn towards an innovative, personalised and experiential way of 'doing religion differ-

ently' (Sutcliffe 2003: 35, 37). Growing significance is attached to the space of personal existence: states of mind, memories and experiences. Hence, it is argued, the ideology of spirituality is to focus on so-called 'soft' aspects of culture and religion, such as emotions and relationships, and to attach greater significance to subjectivities in general.

As a consequence, the dependence on authorities gives way to a greater reliance on the ability of each individual to decide for herself how to realise her full human potential. According to Taylor, the notion of being 'spiritual but not religious' reflects a reaction against and disillusionment towards religious authoritative claims: rather than following confessional leadership, contemporary individuals strive to follow their own spiritual itinerary (Taylor 2007: 535). This development amounts to a decreasing interest in institutional religions with traditional leadership, dogmas and ethical rules, and an increasing interest in new forms of spirituality emphasising holistic experiences, inner development and subjective choices. From such a perspective, organised religion is readily dismissed as narrow, unimaginative and socially constricting, even detrimental, whereas spirituality is understood as 'open', 'inner' and 'living experience'. Defining a personal religious or spiritual position is no longer merely a question of formal membership of an organisation. Rather, a spiritual identity is formed through various different practices: by belonging to an internet community, by following certain diets and health practices, by choosing a certain form of consumer behaviour and following spiritual guides of your own liking. Conclusively, Steven J. Sutcliffe argues, being spiritual has become a mainstream activity; you are no longer dismissed as an oddball simply because you are on a spiritual quest (Sutcliffe 2003: 214–16).

### **Subjectivity, emotions and choice**

Subjective agency and unmediated experiences are key concepts within the discourse on spirituality. Hence, the move from religion to spirituality mirrors another significant change within contemporary culture and society; that is, the increasing weight and value attached to the individual. Inger Furseth describes the current transformation of the religious landscape as a move from finding truth to finding oneself. Whereas previous generations thought about their religious commitment in terms of duties and obligations, the contemporary trend is rather to 'set out to dissect every accepted norm and explore and form new ones'. According to Furseth, this shift in religious orientation discloses a turn away from others and towards the self; away from the group

and towards the unique human being (Furseth 2006: 296–7). Consequently, tradition is often spoken of with rather negative connotations, as a shell empty of true spiritual content and an obstacle to individual self-realisation and choice. Each individual is regarded as responsible for developing her own worldview—an independently formed credo of faith, experience and aspirations rendering meaning to her own existence. The language of individualism does not, however, exclude care and concern for community: ‘Personal autonomy seems to be a growing basis on which many people. . . relate to the sacred. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that community is unimportant’ (Furseth 2006: 311). Thus, the subjective turn does not seem to be as massive and uniform as is often assumed in theoretical descriptions of the post-secular society.

The focus on individualism and subjectivity elevates the element of choice to an essential guideline within the post-secular scenery. Instead of functioning as unalterable norms and codes of law, traditions and scriptures are increasingly given the role of symbolic repositories to be used and applied by the individual according to her personal preferences (Geels 2009: 21). As a growing number of people prefer personally collected and constructed spiritual solutions to the ready-made packages of creed and conduct offered by traditional religious institutions, the importance of finding and justifying your own path in the landscape of richly diversified options becomes crucial. According to Taylor (2007: 11), this is a world in which ‘the fate of belief depends much more than before on powerful intuitions of individuals, radiating out to others.’ Such intuitions, however, may be all but self-evident to others.

We live in a condition where we cannot help but be aware that there are a number of different construals, views which intelligent, reasonably undeluded people, of good will, can and do disagree on. We cannot help looking over our shoulder from time to time, looking sideways, living our faith also in a condition of doubt and uncertainty. (Taylor 2007: 11.)

In the contemporary realm of religion and spirituality, however, choice need not be framed as a selection between two clearly contrasting alternatives, such as sharply separated faith traditions. Furthermore, the making of a choice need not be regarded as a definitive or irrevocable decision. Rather, the post-secular situation offers possibilities to combine elements from different times, traditions and territories in a personal and tentative fashion. Faith is no longer the natural ‘default option’ of every human being. Therefore, the entire background against which the processes of choice, combination and renounce-



ment are played out is altered. In this new situation, after both religion and secularisation, not even belief and unbelief seem to provide mutually exclusive existential positions. It is rather a question of personally exploring the vast landscape opening up between the ultimate poles of fundamentalism and atheism and all the viable routes of spiritual experience found in this terrain (Taylor 2007: 4, 12, 14).

In the post-secular situation, the doctrinal aspects of religions seem to attract less interest as the demand for emotionally fulfilling experiences of faith increases. The focus of religious life seems to be shifting from theoretical claims of truth and theology to 'different kinds of lived experience involved in understanding your life in one way or the other' (Taylor 2007: 5). The end of the modern era and the consequent turn from religion to spirituality has nurtured a growing scepticism towards the strong belief in rational solutions. The interest in the emotional and experiential dimensions of religious faith is therefore appearing as an alternative to the 'religion of reason'. The spiritually inspired process of self-transformation hence seems to include a striving to reach beyond rationality by grounding one's religious outlook in personal experience (Martikainen 2007: 366). In a recent article on new spiritualities and mysticism, Antoon Geels presents a number of changes he regards (on the basis of research carried out by Liselotte Frisk) as distinctive for the current transformation of the religious landscape. This analysis also aptly ties together the threads of the discussion on post-secularity presented above (Geels 2009: 13–15):

- *From particular to eclectic.* Instead of using only one source in building one's worldview, contemporary believers increasingly regard the world religions as resources to be explored, assessed and combined in an individual way.
- *From dogma to experience.* Theoretical aspects of religion, such as truth claims and doctrinal regulations, are increasingly abandoned in favour of a more practically pluralistic religiosity.
- *From collective to personal.* Influenced by neo-liberal and consumer-centred ideologies, the individual is empowered as a competent actor in choosing and creating the personal religious outlook.
- *From a hierarchical to an egalitarian life-view.* Traditional institutional leadership and divisions of religious communities are replaced with a view of the open and unrestricted spiritual community.
- *From a theological to an anthropological dimension.* Religion as a human reality primarily defined by lived experience is advanced.

- *From life after death to this-worldliness.* The divine dimension is regarded as immanent in man and the world rather than transcendent and distant.

## Pilgrims in a new religious landscape

The trends characterising the contemporary post-secular turn of culture, society and religion present both theoretical and empirical challenges to the research on pilgrimage. In their classic study, Victor and Edith Turner pointed to the fact that the history of pilgrimage seems to be as ancient and culturally diverse as humankind itself. In their view, the religious desire to travel—to undertake a journey in search of the sacred—is an inter-religious imperative, enticing the spiritual seeker into a liminal landscape of transition and potentiality (Turner & Turner 1978: 1–3). How, then, does this ancient pattern of the travelling man—*homo viator*—fit into the contemporary context of late modernity, asks Luigi Tomasi (2002: 3): Are the motives for religious travelling still the same, or have the changes in religious outlooks brought any significantly new aspects to the pursuit of pilgrimage?

In Tomasi's view, human travel and its approaches to the sacred are always tied to a social context and historical situation. Therefore, the pilgrimages of today are profoundly different from their ancient predecessors. As the emphasis in historical times was placed on religiously stipulated virtues such as penitence, purification and redemption, current religious travellers place greater significance on inner dispositions and the transformation taking place within the self during the pilgrimage (Tomasi 2002: 13). Modern individuals seek authenticity in different ways, Tomasi underlines, and therefore the modes of religious travel have become simultaneously both personalised and pluralised. As a special form of human mobility, pilgrimage tests and sustains complex cultural constructions of self and other, group identity and social reality, geographical space and historical time—at times even ultimate reality. Along with any other given form of travel, it is thus to be regarded as 'plural, subject to dispute, and changing over time' (Adler 2002: 26–7). Hence, the turn from collective to individual, as noted by Geels, seems to be a relevant ingredient in the contemporary pilgrimage.

Even if the forms and functions of pilgrimage change, the fundamental need for sacralised experiences remains the same, Tomasi still claims: 'The desire for the sacred is by no means fading, nor has the modern individual's impulse after the Absolute diminished' (Tomasi 2002: 18–19). Therefore, pilgrimage can also in its modern form be understood as a quest for a 'sacred

centre' (Adler 2002: 26). Nevertheless, new modes of experiencing the sacred are apparent among contemporary religious travellers, one of the most significant novel trends being the inclination to mix different religious and spiritual sources—at times even stretching the limits between sacred and profane—in creating a personal travel itinerary (Tomasi 2002: 20). As noted above, assessment and choice are regarded as cornerstones of the post-secular ethos and therefore it is not surprising that creative combinations occur also in the field of pilgrimage. All forms of travel are today readily associated with a pluralistic experience of the world, moving our senses out of the ordinary context and into the 'radical potentialities of disorientation', seeking the strange and plunging into it (Plate 2009: 264; Ruf 2009: 268). In contemporary pilgrimage, therefore, traditions and influences seem to mix in a number of personal and creative ways, exemplifying the turn from particular to eclectic.

How, then, can the findings of the Oxford research group concerning the general popularity of the term spirituality among pilgrims be understood? What added value can a 'traditional believer' gain from the flourishing interest in spirituality? Even if the term in its more recent application has largely been dissociated from traditional religions, spirituality need not, however, be opposed to traditional religious institutions. Within the mystic traditions of several world religions, spirituality has historically been used for intense, holistic dimensions of devotion, where thought and emotion meet. Thus, the term has often been associated with an emphasis on inner growth and the cultivation of a deeper spiritual life within the different religious traditions (Geels 2009: 15, 17). In these cases, the spiritual experience is firmly anchored in a given tradition—widening its scope rather than moving out of it. Spirituality seems to be a growing force, not only outside the established religious institutions, but also within them (Heelas & Woodhead 2005: 366). Hence, the interest in spirituality among Stonehenge visitors and Lourdes travellers alike is not surprising: depending on interpretative framework, it can become a central concept both for traditionally Christian pilgrims and for pilgrims within neo-pagan traditions and alternative spiritualities.

In my interpretation, this development reflects the turns from dogma to experience and from the theological to the anthropological which were discussed above. The inclination towards mystical forms of religiosity also underlines the embodied nature of the pilgrim experience. In a recent issue of *Cross Currents* dedicated to 'Varieties of Contemporary Pilgrimage', S. Brent Plate argues that the study of pilgrimage reveals how religion itself actually is vitally physical. In his opinion, the exposure to novel sights, sounds, tastes and smells can function as 'corporal inspiration' for the pilgrim who enters

into the transcendent locale of a pilgrim site. Whether the travel has been undertaken for noble, pious, pure, impure or just plain curious reasons, there is something about the concrete, bodily quest itself that makes the pilgrimage potentially transformative. Therefore, he concludes, the study of pilgrimage 'brings religion to its senses' in a way that abstract studies of doctrines and texts can never achieve (Plate 2009: 263, 266).

To conclude the discussion on contemporary forms of pilgrimage, one notices that the transformative processes brought together under the heading of post-secularity also seem to be relevant within this field: pilgrims, too, experience a turn from collective to subjective, from particular to pluralistic, from theoretical to experiential. Pilgrimages are most frequently collective undertakings, but they can also be described in a theoretically valid way as individual journeys 'toward an "elsewhere" sometimes more desired than known' (Tomasi 2002: 3). From such a point of view, the journey towards spirituality and faith undertaken by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt can be meaningfully illuminated in the context of post-secular pilgrimages. The subjective and tentative way of thinking about one's personal religious commitment displayed in the discussion above is characteristic also of Schmitt, towards whose personal pilgrimage and spiritual worldview we now turn our interest. In my opinion, Schmitt's religious reasoning displays and illuminates several of the features recognised as distinctive of the post-secular pilgrim.

## Encountering the Absolute

Since the beginning of 2008, I have been involved in a research project on interreligious dialogue, focusing on novel, creative forms of encountering the religious other. Within this project, I have interviewed several artists around Europe who, in their professional work have focused on the encounter between persons of different faiths—in photography, multimedia art, music and literature. In a similar way as the embodied practice of pilgrimage, art seems to provide a popular channel for expressing and experiencing religion today, in line with the post-secular watchwords of exalting subjectivity, engaging all senses and abandoning pure rationality as a life norm. Some of these artists, who have their roots in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, move comfortably within the traditional frames of their own religion while others have given up a personal religious commitment, opting instead for the position of the distanced observer. From these rather different points of departure, the artists give their views on the question: how to live together in the religiously plural world of today?

Creative interreligious dialogue is hence the main topic of the project that brought me into contact with Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt. He has reached a world-wide audience with his symbolically dense and humorous tales of encounters between persons of different cultures, religions and ages. Especially the collection of five short fiction stories called *Le Cycle de l'Invisible* (1997, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2009) presents a researcher of religion with intriguing narratives for analysis. The characters often express an extraordinarily open attitude towards religious truth, which also reflects the worldview of the author: No religion is true, no religion is false, as one of Schmitt's characters, the Catholic priest Père Pons, claims (Schmitt 2004: 65). The following presentation of the personal pilgrimage that transformed Schmitt from a hardcore academic atheist to a spiritually inspired novelist is based mainly on an interview I conducted in June, 2008. Additional sources I have solicited include Schmitt's autobiography *Ma vie avec Mozart* (2005) and his official homepage on the internet ([www.eric-emmanuel-schmitt.com](http://www.eric-emmanuel-schmitt.com)).

Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt became a writer of fiction as a result of a personal spiritual development. Born in 1960 in an atheist home in Lyon, he grew up in an atmosphere where 'it was obvious that God was dead and religions were agonising or dying' (IF mgt 2008/52). A serious illness in his youth left him depressed and questioning the meaning of life, but through theatre and classical music he rediscovered the beauty of life. After finishing school Schmitt entered university to study philosophy and earned his doctoral degree on the topic of enlightenment philosophy at the age of 27. A few years later, in 1989, a journey to the Sahara changed his life forever.

Pilgrimage is often tightly connected to our sense of identity, S. Brent Plate writes, and sometimes the best way to find ourselves on such journeys is to get lost (Plate 2009: 263). This statement seems to give an apt description of what happened to Schmitt during his travel: by losing his direction for a while, he found an inner spiritual current and a new direction for his professional life. The purpose of his trip to the Sahara was purely recreational but unfortunately—or fortunately, Schmitt comments—he got lost. For almost two days he wandered alone in the desert without sufficient clothing, shelter or food before being found again by his fellow travellers. But rather than seeing this incident as a disaster, Schmitt experienced a personal mystical awakening. Instead of being afraid, he says, he received faith:

But this. . . was not faith in the God of Christianity, in the God of Islam, in the God of Judaism. Because there was no religious structure or culture in me, I did not recognise him, God. It was a monotheistic experience, a

mystic and monotheistic experience of God and very surprising for me. It was difficult for me to put a name on it. (IF mgt 2008/52.)

Describing this experience in his autobiography, Schmitt uses the metaphor of music: the mystical encounter, like Mozart's music, relieved fundamental anxieties, pulled him away from the enticement of non-being and placed him firmly on the path of life. In such moments, Schmitt writes, all our questions are finally silenced and replaced by a feeling of 'satisfied unity'. He also recalls a sentence constantly repeating itself in his mind: 'Everything is justified' (Schmitt 2005: 131). Schmitt felt he had experienced the Absolute; he was spiritually empowered and clear about his future destiny: he was to become a writer. Returning to France, Schmitt wondered how to continue. He started reading the founding texts and mystical poetry of the major world religions and to his surprise, his response was not to reject them as before, but to find interest and identification. Gradually, over the course of several years, the contemplations grew into a personal faith. It was a long journey for him, he says, and even today God remains 'very exotic' (IF mgt 2008/52). A few years after his mystical experience, Schmitt shot to fame in France as a playwright and decided to abandon his academic career to become a full-time writer. He started his narrative journey into the creative landscape of interreligious encounters, a journey that thus far has resulted in a vast number of novels, short stories, essays and plays.

As seen in Schmitt's description of the extraordinary journey that turned into a personal, spiritual pilgrimage on the way, disorientation can indeed play a significant and fascinating role in religious travel. Usually, we regard it as favourable to have a clear idea of who we are and where we are going in contrast to being disorientated and confused. Still, Frederic J. Ruf writes, there are instances when we willingly choose discord and disruption, 'when *they* become our orientation' (Ruf 2009: 275). For Schmitt, the trip to the Sahara became just such a pilgrimage, offering a chance to encounter the strange—in the form of divine transcendence—and to transform his personal life situation in a profound way.

### **Complexity and incarnation**

The pluralistic experience of pilgrimage and travel seems to require an expanded language in order to be communicated; it needs 'words that will be flexible and supple, words that will not grab hold for dear life, but that will

pull us forward, farther and farther' (Ruf 2009: 278). In my interpretation, this comment sheds light on the way of reasoning that after the sojourn in the Sahara led Schmitt to choose literature as his mode of expression rather than academic research. Literature is the sense of complexity, Schmitt asserts: its purpose is to legitimate different perspectives. 'The purpose is not: What is true? The purpose is: How is it possible to live together?' Therefore, novels can be helpful in creating awareness of the necessity of a pluralistic humanity. The wish to express complexity in his writing was one of the reasons why Schmitt abandoned a successful academic career to become a writer of fiction: philosophy strives to simplify the world, literature makes it even more complex, he asserts. Another reason was the wish to include emotions in his texts. The overall reaction of the French intelligentsia to this choice was astonishment, Schmitt admits, but in his view, the leap from fact to fiction is not that great. Intellectual life is always connected to emotions, he declares: an intellectual without feelings is an abstract man and philosophy abstracted of emotion is pure craziness (IF mgt 2008/52).

Feelings often mark the beginning of an intellectual journey, Schmitt believes, because 'you have to think inside life, inside your body, with your emotions'. This is where art becomes important to interpersonal communication and understanding: by telling a fictional but engaging story you can give your readers access to the religious other in a fresh and enriching way. By including emotions, literature can be more effective than rational arguments: it describes encounters of real human beings rather than purely academic speculations. It creates wisdom instead of simple knowledge. 'It has to be incarnated; it has to be flesh and blood and feelings', Schmitt asserts (IF mgt 2008/52).

The purpose of literature is, according to Schmitt, 'to explore the world and to explore the minds and hearts of people'. As an artist he regards it as his mission to create respect and sensibility towards the religious complexity of the world; to promote peace, love, understanding and curiosity. 'Art is useful for life', Schmitt claims: it makes us able to live together. Through poems, music and literature we may catch a glimpse of the indiscernible and discover a world where the shared vulnerability and interdependence of humanity replaces our individual selves as the central axis. This is of course an invented world, but it is nevertheless *our* world, Schmitt claims: a shared space of harmony and beauty, 'beside nature, . . . beyond Christianity, Judaism; independent of religion' (Schmitt 2005: 50–1, 111).

As are the post-secular pilgrims mentioned earlier, Schmitt is prone to talk about spirituality rather than religion in conveying his relationship to the topic. 'I am inspired by the religions', he claims, 'but I am not a religious per-

son, rather a “believing agnostic.”’ When asked if God exists, Schmitt simply responds: ‘I don’t know. Believing and knowing are different approaches’, he says, but at least in his experience, God is present in every human being, in her questions. If God is just fiction, he concludes, it is useful fiction (IF mgt 2008/52). Schmitt describes his interest towards religion as a humanist one. To him, the primary question is not whether a religion is true or not, but how different people understand these ultimate realities. Religions help us to create meaning and to deal with the mysteries of life, he claims. Thus, the human aspect of religiosity is more relevant than the doctrinal. Schmitt declares:

I am believer, but I still consider life a pure mystery. But I have a different way to inhabit this mystery now. My first way to live in this mystery was fear, anxiety. My new way. . . is faith and confidence. It’s still a mystery, but the feeling is totally different: faith and confidence instead of fear and anxiety. And that’s the benefit of religions; [they] open your brain to other things than pure rationalism. (IF mgt 2008/52.)

In Schmitt’s arguments, spirituality is often paralleled with the notion of mysticism. By giving precedence to experience over rational reasoning and traditional dogmas, contemporary spirituality certainly bears a significant familiarity with the classical mystical traditions inherent in many of the world’s religions. In a similar vein as the traditions of mysticism, the discourse on spirituality emphasises a religiosity grounded in personal practice and experience and advocates a view of human beings as ‘more than the sum total of words and thoughts’ (Geels 2009: 15, 20). Whereas mysticism traditionally has had quite an elitist label in religious circles, pertaining only to an exclusive group of initiated masters, the notion of spirituality has gained a more widespread use in contemporary culture, capturing also intensive, inner experiences on a popular level. The spiritual attitude characteristic of the post-secular condition thus tends to give emphasis to subjective traits such as passions, enthusiasm and feelings in the unmediated experience of spirituality. A post-secular account of religiosity, hence, needs to acquire a sense of lived experience (Sutcliffe 2003: 218; Taylor 2007: 8).

To Schmitt, interreligious encounters are complex challenges where not only two religions (as theoretical and historical constructions), but also human beings stand against each other. Thus, as mentioned above, his writing acknowledges the post-secular critique of the body–soul dichotomy and regards the human spiritual experience as a holistic unity. At the heart of religions, one could say, there are bodies: breathing, sensing, feeling and inter-



acting (Plate 2009: 267). In Schmitt's novels, complexity is a key word and the lines of difference transformed in the encounter are several: Muslim–Jew, young–old, happy–sad, powerful–powerless, convinced–confused:

I am obsessed with complexity! For me, it is a mistake to desire a simple solution, a simple truth, a unique algebraist formula. It's terrible because it's impossible. You have to fight against this obsession of simple ideas in order to accept complexity. (IF mgt 2008/52.)

In the presentation of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's life story and authorship given above, several hallmarks of the post-secular pilgrim have been salient: his perspective is an eclectic, subjective and emotionally saturated understanding of spirituality as an inner, holistic experience. As a conclusion, Schmitt strives to underline that our identities, in the end, are the results of pure chance; of historical coincidences, social patterns and hazards. A fixed and stable identity—uniting us with some who share it and separating us from others who do not—is fiction. The human way to survive is, according to him, to accept the complexity of our interpersonal world. In his writing, therefore, he wants to be 'clear about complexity' at all levels of life, which is always richer than we are able to imagine.

### Concluding remarks

In my interpretation, the analysis presented above concerning the spiritual journey of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt and the convictions and values he promotes today, sheds light on many of the aspects that seem central to the religious motivations of contemporary pilgrims. Returning to the aspects presented at the beginning of this article as characteristic for the post-secular situation, we may recall that spirituality seemed to be a more attractive word than religion to pilgrims of different affiliations, representing a subjective, emotionally charged way of experiencing the divine holistically through body and mind. Moreover, the goal of finding oneself and finding a deeper meaning in life seemed central as the focus shifted from theories, institutions and collectives to emotional experiences, creative combinations and personal choices.

The personal development story of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt follows similar thematic lines: an intense physical experience initiates a progress from the simple truths offered by rationalist science to emotionally informed nar-

ratives of complexity, from fear and anxiety to faith and confidence. Thus, I think Schmitt in his biographical statements and in his novels gives a description of the post-secular spirit that inspires many pilgrims of today. This inclusive spirit was tangible also during my visit to Santiago de Compostela, where I soon noticed how difficult it is to divide the visitors into watertight categories of either 'traditional' pilgrims or travellers inspired by new forms of spirituality. Among the pilgrims I observed, there seemed to be a mix of believers motivated primarily by the Catholic doctrines, persons seeking a spiritual experience, taking on a challenging adventure, or just taking a tourist trip with an extra twist. Also, the numerous souvenir shops revealed that not only were Christian symbols desired by the pilgrims, but that neo-pagan objects and items related to the new spiritualities were equally popular. A positive apprehension of plurality seems to guide the post-secular pilgrim.

Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt can indeed be regarded as a post-secular pilgrim, but also as a modern mystic. Lost in the Sahara, he felt a connection to the Absolute, that everything was justified, that God was greater than any narrow, worldly divisions. In his opinion, love is the real heart of all religions: it marks the 'tenderness of the creator' (Schmitt 2005: 104). As mentioned above, his worldview includes an uncompromised respect for complexity, but also openness to the idea of a common humanity, expressed, to conclude, in words resembling classical mysticism:

In fact, I think I have everything in me, because the other is just one possible me. . .with another story. What we have in common are the questions, what makes us different are the answers. (IF mgt 2008/52.)

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## « Souviens-toi, sois prudent »

### Les pèlerinages motards<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Le sujet de ma recherche provoque en général trois réactions : tout d'abord l'étonnement, puis la curiosité et finalement l'intérêt. Il est vrai que ce choix peut sembler surprenant puisque le motard ne paraît pas religieux de prime abord et se situe souvent bien loin, voire à l'opposé des clichés que l'on se fait de l'être religieux ou spirituel. On croirait plutôt que le motard n'a pour unique dieu que sa machine à laquelle il voue un culte sans faille, or les faits démontrent que ce n'est pas toujours le cas.

C'est d'abord l'envie d'en savoir plus sur le monde des motards d'une manière générale qui est à la base de ma démarche. En effet, ce groupe peut parfaitement être étudié en tant que société à part entière avec les rites, les mythes, la hiérarchie, les saluts, la solidarité, les codes, etc. qui le caractérisent. En tant qu'anthropologue des religions<sup>2</sup>, je me suis intéressée à trouver les liens entre les sociétés et la religion et j'ai longtemps cherché comment aborder la dimension religieuse dans ce milieu. Ce sont finalement les recherches de littérature, les explorations de la Toile et les nombreuses conversations informelles avec des motards qui m'ont menée sur la piste des pèlerinages à moto.

Dans le présent article, je vais en introduction exposer brièvement ma méthode de travail, puis expliquer ce qu'est un motard pour mieux aborder le lien entre la religion et ce milieu en donnant une définition plus précise du « pèlerinage motard ». Je proposerai alors d'aborder ce type de pèlerinage comme un rituel rythmé et je présenterai brièvement mes questions de recherche. Je parlerai ensuite de la notion de risque lié à la pratique de la moto et du rapport à la mort qui est un élément essentiel pour comprendre pourquoi la bénédiction des pilotes et des véhicules représente le moment fort de ces

1 Je me permets ici d'employer un nom comme adjectif en adéquation avec le jargon utilisé dans le milieu étudié.

2 Concernant l'anthropologie des religions, voir, entre autres, Wallace 1966.

manifestations. Pour ancrer la théorie, je présenterai ensuite à titre d'exemple le pèlerinage motard de la Madone des Centaures pour en arriver à la partie conclusive qui recensera quelques-unes des différentes possibilités d'aborder le sujet qui s'offrent encore à moi.

### ***Méthode de travail***

Le corps de cet article est constitué par le résultat d'analyses préliminaires effectuées dans le cadre de ma recherche de doctorat. La littérature sur ce sujet étant pratiquement inexistante, c'est en employant des méthodes propres à la recherche qualitative, telles que les entretiens semi-directifs et l'observation participante que j'ai jugé bon d'aborder ce phénomène. J'ai également recueilli des informations à l'aide de questionnaires-tests déposés dans quelques « bars à motards »<sup>3</sup> en Suisse romande. Si je n'ai mené que peu d'entretiens semi-structurés jusqu'à maintenant, j'ai favorisé l'écoute et l'analyse de conversations libres (ou entretiens exploratoires) retranscrites le jour même ou parfois enregistrées lors des mes observations participantes. J'ai également photographié et filmé différentes étapes de ces pèlerinages et ce matériel a déjà été en grande partie analysé.

A ce propos, il est important de signaler ici que c'est au guidon de ma propre moto et non en tant que passagère que j'ai participé à plusieurs pèlerinages en Italie, France, Belgique et Suisse. Cette remarque peut sembler superflue, mais dans le contexte étudié, le statut de pilote ou de passagère est un élément



Messe en plein air. Pèlerinage de la Madone des Motards, Porcaro, France, 15.08.09. Photo Magali Jenny. Tous droits réservés © Magali Jenny 2009.

3 Par « bars à motards » j'entends des endroits dans lesquels de nombreux motards se réunissent et qui organisent des événements en lien avec le monde de la moto (démonstrations, expositions, réunions lors de compétitions, etc.).

important de reconnaissance (cf. McCutcheon 1999). Bien que les femmes ne soient pas encore très nombreuses à piloter leur propre véhicule, cet effort force le respect des hommes motards et donne ainsi accès à des informations de première main auxquelles une simple passagère ne pourrait pas prétendre. Un voyage, effectué dans des conditions parfois difficiles, est un moyen de prouver son attachement au groupe, sa solidarité envers les autres, sa résistance morale et physique et représente, à de nombreux titres, un rite de passage pour être accepté dans la grande famille des motards. La problématique du rôle de l'observateur participant dans la recherche de terrain n'a rien de nouveau. Je tiens à préciser ici que j'ai pleinement conscience de cette difficulté.

### ***Qu'est-ce qu'un motard ?***

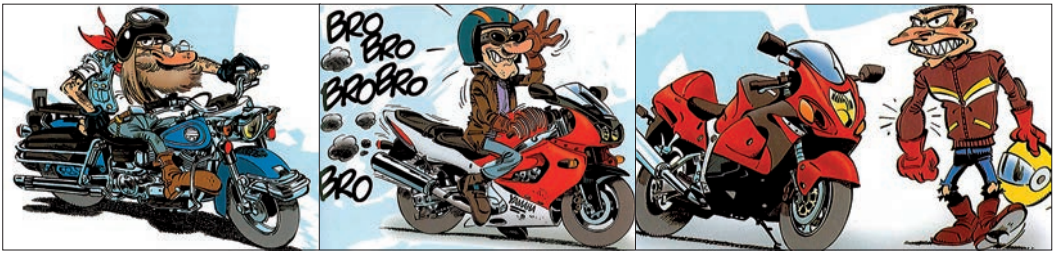
Il faut ici introduire quelques précisions dans la définition du motard. En effet, les pays anglo-saxons ou d'Europe du Nord ont une vision très différente de celle que l'on en a dans des pays d'Europe centrale ou du Sud. Dans les pays étudiés (Italie, France, Allemagne et surtout la Suisse), le motard, s'il est encore parfois considéré comme un marginal, voire un rebelle, est loin de l'image du *biker* hors-la-loi et violent<sup>4</sup> qui défraie la chronique régulièrement et qu'on imagine mal participer à un pèlerinage. Il existe bien dans ces pays des bandes organisées, mais leur influence et leur pouvoirs sont restreints par rapport à celles des pays anglo-saxons. En revanche, en Europe du Nord, mais surtout aux États-Unis et au Canada, les motards sont encore organisés en gangs hiérarchisés et exercent un contrôle puissant sur les marchés de la drogue, des armes ou de la prostitution. Ma connaissance de ces terrains, bien que limitée, me permet d'affirmer qu'il existe d'autres catégories de motards, mais les *bikers* sont de loin les plus médiatisés et dominent l'image qu'on se fait du motard.

Pourtant, même en Amérique du Nord, là où le motard est presque toujours associé à l'image dure du *biker*, il existe également un pèlerinage qui rassemble chaque année plusieurs milliers de motards, le « Run for the Wall »<sup>5</sup>. Ce voyage vers le mur commémoratif des victimes de la guerre du Vietnam à Washington DC est organisé en souvenir des soldats morts à la guerre, mais également des victimes et des prisonniers américains en lien avec d'autres conflits. C'est également l'occasion de réaffirmer certaines valeurs, de

4 Comme les célèbres Hell's Angels (cf. Lavigne 1987) ou les Rebels (cf. Wolf 1991). Concernant la recherche sur les groupes marginaux, voir Becker 1964.

5 Ce pèlerinage est remarquablement décrit et analysé dans l'ouvrage suivant : Dubisch & Michalowski 2001.

Tableau 1<sup>6</sup>.



Biker.

Frimeur.

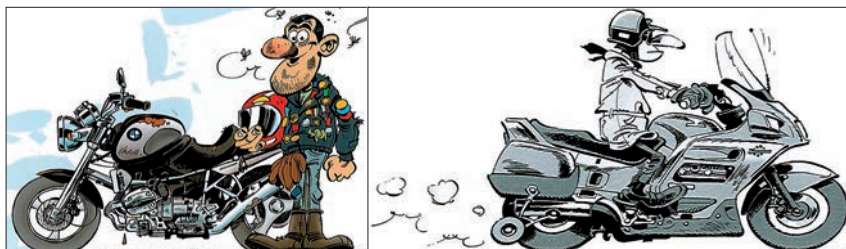
Sportif.

renouveler la solidarité et l'aide aux soldats de retour au pays, qui ont subi de graves traumatismes physiques ou psychiques et dont la réinsertion dans la société reste problématique.

Dans les pays dans lesquels j'effectue mon étude, on distingue plusieurs catégories de motards, dont les *bikers* représenteraient un groupe, surtout identifiable par le modèle de moto ou encore par son équipement particulier. À côté des « vrais bikers » organisés en bande, le « biker du dimanche » recherche une image de « mauvais garçon » sans pour autant adopter ce que l'on pourrait appeler « l'esprit biker ». Souvent issus de la classe aisée et des professions libérales, ces derniers sont à la recherche de sensations fortes qui leur feraient quitter leur cocon doré ; leurs modèles, issus la plupart du temps de la classe populaire, recherchent quant à eux une sensation de liberté et une réelle fraternité. Mais dans la réalité l'identification du motard, comme membre d'un groupe en particulier, est plus compliquée qu'il n'y paraît.

Hormis mes propres observations, j'ai retrouvé des profils similaires décrits et présentés dans de nombreuses bandes dessinées, une des sources privilégiées des motards en plus des magazines spécialisés. En résumé, ces catégories sont au nombre de cinq : le pur (l'authentique), le frimeur, le sportif, le touriste (motard du dimanche) et le biker dont je viens de parler. Ce n'est pas le lieu ici d'énumérer les caractéristiques de ces différents profils, mais les tableaux ci-dessous permettent de s'en faire une idée visuelle et d'identifier les symboles qui s'y réfèrent.

6 Tableau 1 : Batem et Madeline 2008 : 4, 7 et 9. Un grand merci aux Editions Hugo et Cie de m'avoir donné la permission d'utiliser ces images.

Tableau 2<sup>7</sup>.

Pur (authentique).

Touriste (motard du dimanche).

Au-delà de ces différences, ce qui prime avant tout, c'est que les motards eux-mêmes parlent de la « grande famille motarde » et qu'ils sont facilement identifiables, par le moyen de transport et l'équipement utilisés, par les néophytes en tant que groupe unique et non différencié.

Il reste cependant à préciser que les motocyclistes usagers de scooters et de mobylettes (tous les deux des véhicules de petite cylindrée et dont le changement de vitesse est automatique), qui considèrent leur véhicule comme purement utilitaire et pratique ne répondent pas aux critères d'appartenance cités par les motards interviewés. Comme exemple de ce qui est avancé, les motards, qui ont l'habitude de se saluer d'un signe de la main quand ils se croisent sur la route, ne saluent jamais ceux qui roulent sur des scooters, allant parfois même jusqu'à faire montre d'un certain dédain ou snobisme envers eux.

### ***Motards et religion***

Bien que Frédéric Völker établisse une analogie entre moto et religion dans son travail de maîtrise (cf. Völker 2002)<sup>8</sup>, le motard, sur la base de mes observations, oscille entre le religieux et le profane. Cette oscillation s'exprime particulièrement dans la recherche de protection qui se situe à l'intersection du religieux et de l'efficacité magique. Et c'est sans doute pour cette raison que le pèlerinage motard (inscrit dans la tradition catholique des pèlerinages mariaux) rassemble surtout des passionnés de deux roues plutôt que de fervents pratiquant. Cette distanciation de la religion, en tant que système fixe et organisé, ressort très nettement dans l'analyse des réponses

7 Tableau 2 : Bidault 1998 : 45 et 53. Un grand merci aux Editions Vents d'Ouest de m'avoir donné la permission d'utiliser ces images.

8 Consulté sous : <http://oma.chez.com> (14.06.2008).



Les « couleurs » d'un membre du Moto Club Madonna dei Centauri, section italienne.<sup>9</sup>



des interviewés. Mais bien que le voyage soit un des buts premiers, la destination a aussi son importance. On ne va pas dans n'importe quel endroit pour profiter des meilleures routes, on se rend bel et bien dans un lieu chargé de symbolique religieuse, parfois une destination de pèlerinage que l'on ne fait pas seulement à moto, mais également avec d'autres moyens de transport, comme à Lourdes.

C'est là que j'en arrive à une première distinction essentielle.

### ***Pèlerinage à moto et pèlerinage motard***

J'ai longtemps utilisé les termes de « pèlerinage à moto » et de « pèlerinage motard » sans distinction aucune. Actuellement, après avoir suivi plusieurs pèlerinages, j'ai découvert que ce n'est pas la même chose.

Le premier se fait avec des motos comme moyen de transport. Ce même pèlerinage, tant au niveau de sa structure, des motivations et attentes des participants ou de leur implication religieuse peut être fait à pied, à vélo, en train ou en avion. Ce n'est pas tellement le moyen de locomotion qui compte que la destination et les objectifs. Si les pèlerins choisissent la moto, c'est parce qu'ils aiment rouler et ont plaisir à parcourir le chemin de cette manière. Sa structure plus conventionnelle en fait un pèlerinage religieux contrairement au second clairement inscrit dans la catégorie des pèlerinages profanes dans lesquels l'élément religieux a son importance, mais ne représente pas la dimension essentielle et unificatrice.

Le pèlerinage motard, qui sera étudié dans le cadre de cette recherche, est organisé par et pour des motards. Il semble que la passion de la moto soit au centre, bien plus que la dimension religieuse<sup>10</sup>. Le voyage se fait dans certaines conditions, la plupart du temps en groupe. Il a lieu une fois par année,

9 <http://www.mcmadonnina.it/FOTO2009/foto2009.htm> (consulté le 10 octobre 2009).

10 Concernant la discussion sur le changement de la structure et des buts des pèlerinages modernes, voir, entre autres Rivière & Piette 1990.

souvent à la même période, et sur place, la structure, le déroulement, le logement, etc. sont plus ou moins identiques d'un endroit à l'autre. Ce pèlerinage profane, bien qu'il contienne des éléments religieux, laisse une grande place à la liberté individuelle et à la créativité en ce qui concerne l'organisation de rituels personnalisés, souvent destinés à se souvenir ou à rendre hommage à des amis motards décédés dans un accident ou encore à remercier d'avoir échappé à un grave accident. Si un cadre religieux est donné, il semble que ce soit plus pour le côté pratique que symbolique.

### Le pèlerinage motard comme rituel

J'aborde le pèlerinage comme un rituel<sup>11</sup> et ce sont des notions développées par Victor Turner (1990) qui ont émergé suite aux premières observations. La première notion, reprise de l'analyse des rites de passage d'Arnold van Gennep (2004) est celle de liminalité. Arnold van Gennep avait structuré les rites de passages en trois phases : la séparation (du monde auquel le futur initié appartient), la phase liminale (cette période de marge, d'entre-deux pendant laquelle l'initié reçoit son enseignement et perd tout statut) et l'agrégation (le retour dans la société avec un changement de statut). Durant les pèlerinages motards cette phase liminale est marquée par différents éléments sur lesquels je reviendrai ultérieurement. En suivant le modèle de Victor Turner, j'ai décidé d'utiliser le terme « liminoïde »<sup>12</sup> ou « quasi-liminal » (plutôt que celui de « liminal ») qui semble plus adapté à ce contexte puisque inscrit dans la société moderne. Car s'il est vrai que la phase liminale se réfère plutôt à un rituel qui souligne un moment de transition existentielle, un événement « liminoïde » a lieu en marge des conventions dominantes, mais ne marque pas de changement de statut. « Pilgrimages systems are more 'liminoid' (open, optional, not conceptualized as religious routine) than 'liminal' (belonging to the mid-age in a religious processual structure consisting of rites of separation, limen or margin, and reaggregation – as discussed by Arnold van Gennep) » (Turner & Turner 1978 : 231).

11 La discussion autour du pèlerinage en tant que rituel n'est pas nouvelle et de nombreux auteurs ont déjà débattu de ce sujet. Voir, entre autres, Bell 1999. Ou encore, Clift & Clift 1996. Et finalement, Morinis 1992.

12 Pour une explication plus détaillée du concept de « liminoïde », voir Turner 1988 : 29. Pour le lien établi entre pèlerinage et tourisme, également pertinent dans ce contexte, voir, entre autres, Currie & Gagnon 2000 : 115–128.

L'idée d'antistructure (en opposition à la structure établie d'une société) ressort fortement de l'analyse des pèlerinages motards. D'autres éléments avancés par Victor Turner font penser que les motards sont considérés de prime abord comme un groupe en marge de la structure établie : « En bref, mon opinion est que, du point de vue de ceux que concerne le maintien de 'structure', tout ce qui exprime et entretient la *communitas* doit apparaître comme dangereux et anarchique et doit être circonscrit par des prescriptions, des prohibitions et des conditions diverses » (Turner 1969 : 108).

C'est ainsi que j'en arrive à la seconde notion, celle de « *communitas* », partie intégrante de l'espace liminal ou liminoïde, puisque les gens participant à un tel événement se comportent d'égal à égal. Mais est-elle propre au pèlerinage en général ou liée directement au monde motard ? En effet ce dernier se définit comme un milieu dans lequel la solidarité, l'égalité de statut et la fraternité sont des éléments essentiels. Cette communauté<sup>13</sup> est-elle donc réactivée quand les motocyclistes se retrouvent en groupe et pas seulement lors d'un pèlerinage ? D'après ce que j'ai pu observer jusqu'ici et sur la base des entretiens exploratoires effectués, je serais tentée de répondre par l'affirmative.

Pour la plupart des motards interviewés, le terme même de « communauté » pose problème. C'est pour cette raison d'ailleurs et pour éviter toute confusion que Victor Turner, conscient de la connotation négative du mot, a choisi d'utiliser le terme latin plutôt que sa traduction : « Je préfère le terme latin 'communitas' à 'communauté', pour distinguer cette modalité de relation sociale d'une simple 'aire de vie commune' » (Turner 1969 : 97). Ce mot, souvent mal interprété, est associé spontanément à des éléments religieux dont le motard souhaite se distinguer en premier lieu. « Non, je ne pense pas que les motards soient une communauté. On n'est pas une secte ou un truc baba cool. On est plutôt un groupe de copains, une grande famille » explique l'un d'eux. Il est vrai que dans les discours spontanés, les termes de « famille », « groupe », « amis » ou « bande » sont favorisés. Le mot « communauté » n'est jamais utilisé, mais dans leur définition de ce qu'est la « famille des motards », les interviewés énoncent des critères (cités ci-dessus) clairement liés à ce que l'on appelle dans le jargon sociologique la « *communitas* ». Cette famille n'est d'ailleurs jamais perçue et définie comme une structure comprenant des parents et des enfants. Loin de toute hiérarchie, la famille motarde est constituée uniquement de « frères » et parfois de « sœurs », même si c'est plus rare. Sans entrer dans les détails, Victor Turner distingue trois types de « *communitas* » : existentielle ou spontanée, normative et idéologique. Dans l'état actuel de mes

13 Concernant le concept de « communauté », voir Tönnies 1944.

recherches, je n'ai pas pu encore déterminer de façon précise à quel type les motards et les groupes de pèlerins motards appartiennent. Il est cependant intéressant de relever que Victor Turner cite les Hell's Angel comme un exemple de « *communitas* » contemporaine avec une pseudo hiérarchie (Turner 1969 : 186-187).

En partant du principe que le pèlerinage en tant que rituel s'articule en trois temps distincts, selon le modèle d'Arnold van Gennep (préliminaire, liminaire, postliminaire), ce rythme général pourrait être appliqué au pèlerinage motard de la façon suivante : voyage<sup>14</sup> aller, sur place, voyage retour ; la vie quotidienne serait ici considérée comme un cadre plus général et représenterait le comportement, l'attitude du motard en tant que pilote, membre d'un groupe ou d'un moto-club, mais aussi en tant que personne faisant partie d'un système religieux. Il est cependant légitime de se poser la question si la pratique même de la moto n'est pas d'office considérée par le reste de la société comme marginale ou liminale. En effet, le pilote en endossant son équipement (qui se distingue clairement de l'habillement quotidien) marque sa différence et s'identifie comme faisant partie d'un groupe à part, mais unifié puisqu'à cause de sa tenue il est pratiquement impossible, pour une personne « non initiée », de le distinguer de ses semblables. A cela s'ajoute que les motards adoptent un comportement différent, plus ou moins éloigné selon les individus, des codes sociaux établis (pour exemple : un motard n'aura pas la même attitude et le même respect des règles et du code de la route s'il est à moto ou s'il se déplace en voiture ; quand un motard ne respecte pas les limitations de vitesse en dehors des zones d'habitation, c'est tout à fait normal, c'est même un signe d'appartenance, alors qu'un automobiliste qui ne respectera pas les mêmes limitations aux mêmes endroits sera considéré comme « un fou dangereux » et un inconscient). J'ai choisi de laisser momentanément de côté cette interrogation pour considérer la participation complète au pèlerinage comme un espace et un temps « liminoïdes », rythmés par différentes étapes.

Pilgrimage has some of the liminal phase attributes in passage rites: release from mundane structure; homogenization of status; simplicity of dress and behavior, both on the journey, and as characteristic of the goal, which is itself a source of *communitas*, healing and renewal; ordeal; reflection on the meaning of religious and cultural core-values; ritualized

14 En ce qui concerne le lien entre pèlerinage et voyage, voir, entre autres : Chiara Canta, Cipriani & Turchini 1999. Le voyage peut aussi être vu comme un voyage intérieur ; à ce sujet voir Pirsig 1978. Voir également Rowland 2006.

reenactment of correspondences between a religious paradigm and shared human experience; [...] individuality posed against the institutionalized milieu; and so forth. (Turner & Turner 1978 : 253-254.)

La phase préliminaire serait donc le voyage vers la destination. Ce voyage peut être court (un jour) ou plus long (deux ou trois jours), mais il est déjà empreint d'une certaine liminalité puisque le pèlerin quitte les jalons de la vie quotidienne. Ce voyage se fait en général en groupe et si on part seul, il est pratiquement impossible d'éviter un certain regroupement surtout lorsque l'arrivée est proche. Le voyage, le plaisir de rouler, la compagnie font que le motard choisira rarement la voie la plus directe et la plus rapide pour arriver à destination, mais bien la route la plus pittoresque qui offrira les meilleurs virages et les plus beaux paysages. Le fait de changer de route souvent pour se rendre à destination et de ne pas emprunter toujours le même itinéraire est une des particularités du pèlerinage motard.

Pour la phase liminaire, les conversations analysées et mes observations révèlent un « moment particulier » vécu par tous, d'une façon plus ou moins intense; la grande question étant bien entendu de savoir « comment » cette expérience est vécue et quels en sont les points communs et les différences. Reste à découvrir si ce sont les éléments religieux présents lors du pèlerinage ou si c'est le fait de se retrouver uniquement avec des gens partageant la même passion qui donne à ce séjour un goût particulier.

Dans la phase postliminaire que serait le voyage de retour, il sera intéressant de découvrir si on revient changé d'un pèlerinage motard tant au niveau personnel que religieux et que, si changement il y a, s'il affecte aussi dans un deuxième temps la vie de tous les jours.

Quant à la durée du retour, elle varie également, mais les conditions seront similaires à celles de l'aller. Les discussions des retrouvailles feront place à des sujets en lien avec ce qui vient d'être vécu. Le souvenir s'installe et le discours est souvent déjà marqué par une certaine nostalgie.

Dans cette brève description de la structure rythmée du rituel, on voit bien qu'il est difficile de choisir s'il faut aborder le pèlerinage motard en distinguant trois moments, dont la présence sur place représenterait le moment « liminoïde », ou en considérant le pèlerinage dans son ensemble comme un moment déjà clairement « liminoïde ».

Sans perdre de vue cette interrogation, dans l'état actuel de mes recherches les questions principales peuvent être regroupées en trois domaines principaux.

### ***Morphologie et religion***

Le premier domaine regroupe des questions qui permettront de découvrir s'il y a une réelle différence entre les concentrations (rassemblements) et les pèlerinages motards, si les éléments religieux (ou sacrés) sont plus significatifs et plus nombreux que les éléments motards (ou profanes), ou encore si les motocyclistes participent à ces événements religieux.

Après avoir suivi quelques pèlerinages et après avoir mené plusieurs entretiens, il apparaît effectivement que la dichotomie entre le sacré et le profane n'est plus aussi précise dans le contexte d'un pèlerinage motard. Pour reprendre les mots de Victor Turner : « La distinction entre structure et *communitas* ne correspond pas simplement à celle qui est familière entre « séculier » et « sacré », ou celle, par exemple, entre la politique et la religion » (Turner 1969 : 97). Certes, l'élément religieux est présent : une messe, une cérémonie, une bénédiction ou encore une procession sont toujours organisées, mais ce que révèlent les entretiens est tout autre : il semble de prime abord que les motards se regroupent plus pour faire la fête, retrouver leurs amis, rouler ensemble, boire de la bière et écouter des concerts (le côté profane, voire hédoniste) que pour assister à l'un ou l'autre de ces événements religieux. Pourtant, sur le terrain, j'ai constaté que les églises ouvertes à ces occasions ne désemplissent pas, les défilés en moto devant les prêtres pour la bénédiction des pilotes et des véhicules sont très longs et représentent le climax de la manifestation. Il reste que le côté humain supplante clairement le côté « divin ». Les interviewés ne mettent d'ailleurs jamais l'élément religieux en avant, allant jusqu'à considérer un pèlerinage comme un simple rassemblement.

### ***Appartenance et participation***

Le deuxième domaine s'intéresse à des questions concernant l'appartenance religieuse, la foi, la pratique de la religion et tentera de mettre en lumière si ces éléments sont importants pour participer à un pèlerinage motard, si les participants sont tous catholiques et le cas échéant ce qui pousse les gens d'autres religions ou confessions à participer à un tel événement.

Dans ce domaine, je m'intéresserai également à la participation active, à savoir si l'on peut parler de « *communitas* » lors de ces pèlerinages, si la solidarité motarde est une réalité ou un idéal, si le sentiment de « faire partie de cette famille » est plus fort lors des pèlerinages motards et s'il est renforcé par le voyage en groupe, les nuits passées sous tente<sup>15</sup> ou le fait d'avoir des valeurs ou

15 De nombreuses questions de ce type sont traitées dans l'ouvrage suivant : Hervieu-Léger 2003.



Motards se recueillant devant des ex-voto. Pèlerinage de la Madone des Centaures, Alessandria, Italie, 12.07.08. Photo Magali Jenny. Tous droits réservés © Magali Jenny 2009.

une religion en commun. Il est clair que la réactivation des valeurs motardes (fraternité et solidarité par exemple), l'affirmation de son identité et surtout la visibilité que ces rassemblements donnent à un groupe marginalisé sont des éléments très importants.

### *Motivations des participants*

Les questions du dernier domaine, souvent étroitement lié aux parcours de vie des participants, permettront de mieux comprendre ce que les motards viennent chercher dans un pèlerinage et si celui-ci répond à leurs attentes ou encore si la participation est motivée par la recherche de protection ou par l'envie de remercier d'avoir échappé à un accident ou pour venir se souvenir des amis motards décédés.

C'est là peut-être que le lien entre la religion et la culture populaire<sup>16</sup> devient plus étroit et permet l'expression d'une émotion forte, que le religieux rejoint le magique et où ce lien entre religion et superstition pourrait être

16 Concernant la culture et la religion populaires, voir, entre autres, Aden 1999. Voir également Reader & Walter 1993. Voir encore Vinatier 1982.



La bénédiction des pilotes et le défilé. Pèlerinage de la Madone des Motards, Porcaro, France, 2006. Photos Daniel Michon. Tous droits réservés © Daniel Michon 2006.

considéré comme une séparation-liminalité. Pour reprendre les termes de Victor Turner : « On peut se demander pour quelle raison les situations et les rôles liminaires sont presque partout doués de propriétés magico-religieuses [...] » (Turner 1969 : 108). Il est vrai que la bénédiction des pilotes et des véhicules est le moment le plus important pour les motards. Même ceux qui n'auront participé à aucun événement religieux seront présents pour la bénédiction. C'est pour cette raison qu'on peut s'interroger si elle appartient au domaine du sacré ou si elle contient également un ressenti profane proche de la superstition. Dans cette dynamique on peut aussi se demander ce que la médaille fixée sur la moto représente : une image pieuse, une protection ou un rappel à la prudence comme le stipule le texte de la médaille de la Madone des Motards de Porcaro « Souviens-toi, sois prudent ».

## La bénédiction et le rapport à la mort

Cette recherche de protection est intrinsèquement liée au monde de la moto, puisque les pilotes, très exposés, sont susceptibles à tout instant d'être victimes d'accidents graves. La mort<sup>17</sup>, considérée avec un certain fatalisme par toutes les personnes interrogées jusqu'ici, reste une source de peur, mais moins qu'un accident qui priverait le motard de ce à quoi il tient le plus : sa liberté et la pratique de sa passion.

17 Il serait trop long de définir ici précisément le concept de « mort » utilisé. Pour plus de précisions, voir Thomas 1975.





Messe en plein air en présence de plus de 20 000 motards. Pèlerinage de la Madone des Motards, Porcaro, France, 15.08.09. Photo Magali Jenny. Tous droits réservés © Magali Jenny 2009.



Vitrail dans le sanctuaire de la Madone des Motards à Castellazzo Bormida. Pèlerinage de la Madone des Centaures, Alessandria, Italie, 11.07.09. Photo Magali Jenny. Tous droits réservés © Magali Jenny 2009.

Dans une société dans laquelle la sécurité et la protection font partie des valeurs fondamentales, certaines personnes considèrent la prise de risque<sup>18</sup> comme une échappatoire à la routine, comme une affirmation de la liberté individuelle et comme une forme de rébellion contre un système imposé. Même si cette prise de risque est, la plupart du temps, contrôlée et minimisée par des équipements adéquats, le motard reste conscient de sa fragilité et des conséquences dramatiques, voire mortelles que peut avoir chacune de ses erreurs ou simplement le manque d'attention des autres usagers de la route. Cette conscience de la fragilité de l'existence et du danger omniprésent que représente la pratique de la moto renvoie à cette insécurité que les premiers pèlerins devaient connaître quand ils se mettaient en

chemin : intempéries, perte d'orientation, précarité du voyage, bêtes sauvages, mais aussi bandits, assassins, mécréants qui connaissaient bien le chemin des pèlerins étaient considérés comme autant de menaces et de dangers de ne pas arriver vivants au bout de son voyage. Le fait de faire un pèlerinage à moto comporte encore ce facteur risque, même, s'il faut bien l'avouer, les accidents mortels sont plutôt rares dans ce type d'événement.

La prise de conscience de ce facteur de danger lié à la pratique de la moto et la recherche de protection sont d'ailleurs clairement exprimés dans les paroles d'un prêtre juste avant la bénédiction des pilotes et des véhicules : « Ce n'est pas parce que vous allez être bénis et placés sous la protection de la Madone qu'il faut commencer à brûler des stops, des feux rouges, rouler à toute vitesse ou ne pas mettre de casque. Là, même la Madone ne pourra pas vous protéger ! Alors continuez à être attentifs et vigilants et roulez avec respect. Respect des autres, respect des règles aussi ! »

18 Concernant la notion du risque lié à la pratique de la moto, voir, entre autres, Portet 1998 : 453-476.

L'élément de difficulté et de « sacrifice » physique, constitutif du pèlerinage, n'est pas à écarter du pèlerinage motard, même si le défi n'est pas aussi pénible qu'à pied ou à vélo par exemple. En effet, tous ceux qui ont fait cette expérience soulignent que, si la plupart du temps, le voyage est agréable, il suffit que les conditions météorologiques se détériorent ou que les ennuis mécaniques surviennent pour transformer cette partie de plaisir en un véritable parcours du combattant avec son lot de souffrances physiques et morales.

## Un exemple : le pèlerinage de la Madone des Centaures

Sur le site Internet officiel du Moto-Club International de la Madone des Centaures, voici ce qui est écrit :

La moto, une passion irrésistible, qui plonge ses racines dans une époque bien plus ancienne que celle de l'invention du moteur à explosion. Une passion qui dérive de l'amour pour les chevaux, de la tension émotive que donne la maîtrise du moyen en mouvement, de la sensation d'absolue liberté qui trahit l'excitation provoquée par la vitesse, l'illusion de s'élever. C'est peut-être cet esprit qui en 1934 a poussé Marco Re, pharmacien de Castellazzo Bormida, à réorganiser l'Association de Moto de Castellazzo. C'étaient des temps difficiles et bientôt la guerre éclaterait. Ce n'est qu'en 1943 que Marco Re reprend sa propagande dans toutes les Associations de Moto, et dans la revue « La Moto » du 15 Décembre 1943, le directeur Italo Luraschi, dans le style rhétorique de cette époque écrit : « Quand la guerre sera terminée et que la paix régnera de nouveau sur le sol tourmenté de notre Patrie, les motards pourront reprendre leur activité de circulation, d'organisation et de sport ; la Vierge des Motocyclistes (la « Madonnina dei Centauri ») inspirera leur action, guidera leur chemin et protégera leur réussite. Et une fois par an, à l'occasion du jour anniversaire de notre Sainte Patronne, les motards de toute l'Italie se rassembleront à Castellazzo, ce village agréable et accueillant, dans son célèbre Sanctuaire, pour remercier leur Protectrice et pour implorer avec dignité et conscience, comme il convient à des hommes voués à un sport de compétition et de vigueur, la grâce divine. Et ce sera un spectacle digne des temps nouveaux de voir les phalanges des modernes cavaliers de la civilisation mécanique, sur leurs montures d'acier, s'approcher avec leur fanion de l'autel et répéter les rites des anciens chevaliers des Croisades qui, bien doits sur



Deux ex-voto du sanctuaire de la Madone des Centaures à Castellazzo Bormida. Pèlerinage de la Madone des Centaures, Alessandria, Italie, 11.07.09. Photo Magali Jenny. Tous droits réservés © Magali Jenny 2009.

leurs fougueux coursiers, invoquaient la grâce divine avant de livrer bataille contre les barbares et les mécréants. »

Grâce à la ténacité de Marco Re et avec l'approbation de la Fédération Italienne de Moto, le 8 Septembre 1946 eut lieu la première Réunion de Moto de la Vierge des Motocyclistes à laquelle ont participé un millier de motards italiens et une centaine d'étrangers. Tous les journaux et les revues nationales s'occupèrent de cet événement exceptionnel.

Le 11 Février 1947, Le Pape Pie XII a proclamé la Vierge de Castellazzo (la « Vierge de l'argile ») la « puissante Patronne des motocyclistes », depuis ce jour la VIERGE DES MOTARDS. Le Moto Club de la Vierge des Motards Internationaux d'Alexandrie, en collaboration étroite avec le Moto Club Castellazzo, perpétue une tradition qui, grâce au dévouement constant de ses membres, est parvenue en l'an 2000 à sa 55ème réussite. » ([http://www.mcmadonnina.it/lin-francese/storad\\_f.htm](http://www.mcmadonnina.it/lin-francese/storad_f.htm); consulté le 10 octobre 2009.)

C'est donc en 1947, que le Vatican consacra la basilique de Castellazzo-Bormida située à onze km d'Alessandria en Italie, son évêque et sa Madone aux motards du monde entier.

Depuis, des sections nationales, appelées « nations », se sont créées en France, Belgique, Suisse, Espagne ainsi qu'en Allemagne afin d'implorer la protection de leur divine patronne<sup>19</sup>.

La Sainte Vierge de l'Argile, patronne de Castellazzo Bormida et que l'on vénère dans le Sanctuaire, est devenue la protectrice des motards, selon la décision du Pape Pie XII en 1947. A l'intérieur du Sanctuaire se trouvent des centaines d'"ex voto" concernant, entre autres, de nombreux accidents de moto dont les protagonistes se sont miraculeusement sauvés. Malheureusement, pas tous les accidents n'ont eu une issue miraculeuse, cependant beaucoup de casques, qui proviennent du monde entier, sont exposés à la mémoire des morts sur la route.

A l'occasion du rassemblement international en juillet, selon la tradition, le samedi soir, l'évêque du diocèse célèbre la Messe à la mémoire des morts, à laquelle participent tous les représentants officiels des clubs – motos internationaux qui se rattachent à la Madonnina dei Centauri. Toujours à l'occasion de ce rassemblement, un événement unique au monde, les premiers motards représentant les moto-clubs officiels étrangers, entrent en moto dans le sanctuaire pour assister à la Messe et pour recevoir la bénédiction de l'évêque. ([http://www.mcmadonnina.it/lin-francese/vergine\\_f.htm](http://www.mcmadonnina.it/lin-francese/vergine_f.htm) ; consulté le 10 octobre 2009.)

Ces motards « méritants » sont appelés « premiers centaures » et ce titre honorifique doit ensuite être porté dignement. Les premiers centaures sont souvent choisis parmi les membres des moto-clubs et depuis quelques années, quelques femmes ont pu accéder à ce titre.

Sur le même site et à divers endroits sur place « la prière du motard » est exposée. Il en existe différentes versions adaptées à chaque pèlerinage. Voici la prière du motard adressée à la Madone des Centaures :

Madone des Centaures, toi qui depuis ce sanctuaire étend sur nous ton manteau, protège-nous des imprévus de la route, par tous les temps et sous n'importe quelle latitude. Sainte Vierge Marie, aide-nous pour que notre comportement soit toujours un bon exemple pour tous : sur la route comme des vrais sportifs et dans la vie comme des ouvriers de fraternité et de paix universelle. Soutiens-nous dans nos moments de faiblesse et permets-nous de vivre en tant que témoins forts de la foi pour te rejoindre

19 Pour connaître l'histoire de ce pèlerinage de ses débuts jusqu'en 1995, voir Re 1995.

au paradis pour nous réjouir en la présence de ton fils Jésus, le bénir et l'aimer pour toujours. Amen. (<http://www.mcmadonna.it/italia/stomad.htm>, ma traduction; consulté le 10 octobre 2009).

Sur le même site officiel, le programme du week-end est également indiqué. Il révèle la structure pratiquement identique de tous les pèlerinages motards. Les éléments religieux ou sacrés comme la messe, la prière pour les morts ou la bénédiction côtoient les éléments profanes: défilés, balade touristique et gastronomique, concerts rock, démonstrations acrobatiques, etc.

Le pèlerinage de la Madone des Centaures a la particularité d'avoir lieu à différents endroits. Une fois par année, le «grand» pèlerinage a lieu à Alessandria en Italie, le deuxième week-end de juillet. Le second pèlerinage annuel est organisé dans l'une des cinq nations. Il rassemble moins de participants, mais il donne l'occasion aux motards du pays concerné de participer à un pèlerinage plus près de chez eux.

Plusieurs groupes d'habités voyagent ensemble ou se retrouvent sur place. Ils seront sans cesse en interaction et se regrouperont pour ne former plus qu'un seul et unique groupe, visible surtout lors du défilé de la bénédiction. En arrivant à Alessandria les motos sont garées toutes ensemble dans la rue principale de la ville, fermée à la circulation pour l'occasion.



Les 'Premiers Centaures' avec leurs motos à l'intérieur de l'église de Castellazzo Bormida (Pèlerinage de la Madone des Centaures, Alessandria, Italie, 12.07.08). Photo Magali Jenny. Tous droits réservés © Magali Jenny 2009.

L'accueil, les retrouvailles avec les amis, les concerts, le défilé, la balade, les démonstrations, la messe commémorative, tout est là pour souligner ce sentiment de faire partie de cette grande famille. La « *communitas* » peut aussi être observée dans le fait que la grande majorité des motards dort sous tente pendant les trois jours que dure la fête. Cette vie « à la dure » masque les appartenances sociales, les professions, le niveau de vie, etc. et contribue au sentiment d'appartenance. Et bien entendu, le lien entre tout et tous est cette passion commune pour la moto présente partout durant ces trois jours.

Lors de mon observation à Alessandria, ce sentiment de vivre un « moment particulier » ou liminoïde est apparu fortement dans l'attitude des policiers à moto. Ces derniers participaient à l'événement en tant que policiers, mais surtout en tant que motards. Durant tout le week-end, les relations étaient respectueuses envers les forces de l'ordre, mais aussi fraternelles. Le lundi sur les routes, tout était redevenu normal. Les policiers motards étaient à nouveau des représentants de l'ordre et n'hésitaient pas à arrêter et contrôler les autres motocyclistes, même ceux qui avaient participé à la fête de la Madone des Centaures. La même attitude de retour à la normale est à signaler dans le comportement des automobilistes ou des habitants de la région plus tolérants pendant les trois jours que dure la manifestation.

## Eléments conclusifs

La thèse peut, à plusieurs titres, être comparée à un voyage à moto. Bien évidemment, il reste encore des pistes à explorer, de nombreux kilomètres à parcourir et la route vers la destination finale est encore longue. Les outils que j'utiliserai dans cette aventure et qui me permettront d'arriver à bon port font partie de la panoplie de la méthode qualitative. L'aller-retour entre entretiens



Défilé de la Madone des Centaures à Fribourg en Suisse en 1953. Photo de Jacques Thévoz, Archives de la Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire du canton de Fribourg. Photo [http://www.fr.ch/v\\_bcu/media/images/fonds/jath/jath\\_40871\\_600.jpg](http://www.fr.ch/v_bcu/media/images/fonds/jath/jath_40871_600.jpg) (consulté le 24 mai 2008).



Détail d'un étendard de la Vierge des Motards dans le rétroviseur d'une moto. Pèlerinage de la Madone des Motards, Porcaro, France, 15.08.09. Photo Magali Jenny. Tous droits réservés © Magali Jenny 2009.

et observations, le tout cadré par les lectures, sera la base de la vérification des hypothèses et une piste balisée sur laquelle je pourrai revenir quand je chercherai ma route après avoir suivi la mauvaise direction.

Dans cet article, comme lorsqu'un motard prépare son paquetage pour un voyage et sait qu'il ne doit emporter avec lui que le strict nécessaire, j'ai volontairement laissé de côté l'explication de certains concepts et je n'ai fait qu'effleurer la définition de certains autres. Je n'ai pas parlé, par exemple, des bénédictions de début de saison qui peuvent être considérées comme des mini-pèlerinages, et comme des occasions de retrouver la « famille motarde » après l'hiver. Tout cela pour ne présenter qu'un seul exemple de cette vaste thématique qui aura peut-être suscité une envie d'en savoir plus sur le sujet et de suivre les motards dans cette aventure. Essayer de comprendre pourquoi les pèlerinages motards sont exclusivement mariaux (alors que le patron des voyageurs est saint Christophe) est une nouvelle route à explorer : les motards (autant hommes que femmes) à la « virilité » exacerbée sont-ils en quête d'une figure féminine, maternelle et protectrice ?

Certains chemins empruntés, brièvement, mériteraient qu'on s'y attarde pour y découvrir des jalons qui se révéleront peut-être essentiels dans ce voyage : comment les motards vivent-ils la prise de risque constante liée à la pratique de la moto ? Comment envisagent-ils la mort et comment vivent-ils les décès des « frères » sur la route ?



Et déjà une bifurcation apparaît avec la promesse d'une nouvelle piste qui m'amènera à établir si l'on devrait parler de « religion de la moto » ou si la pratique de la moto est une façon de prier, comme le pèlerin qui fait le Chemin de Saint-Jacques à pied (cf. Zapponi 2008) ?

Tant de choix à faire et tant d'autres contrées à explorer...

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## Visiting Ground Zero

### Sacred echoes in secular rites

For the past several years since September 11, 2001, large numbers of people from across the continent and around the world have visited the site of the devastated World Trade Center in New York. Scholars in religious studies and the social sciences have noticed that there were and continue to be (though less so over time) religious aspects to the observances and performances of visitors to 'Ground Zero', as the site of the former World Trade Center almost immediately came to be called. (See, e.g., Grimes 2006a.) A central argument of this article is that the ongoing stream of visitors to Ground Zero, strictly speaking, does not qualify this phenomenon as a pilgrimage in the traditional religious sense; it is more akin to the growing phenomenon of religious tourism,<sup>1</sup> although it is not exactly that either. Nonetheless the event of 9/11 generated many ritualized activities; the article will also address the process scholars call 'ritualization' and related terms in ritual studies. Although ritualized performances at Ground Zero do not amount to a pilgrimage in the narrow sense that historians of religion mean when they analyze traditional pilgrimages, such as the Hajj to Mecca, or following the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, visiting Ground Zero has taken on both secular and religious elements which will be discussed below.

The ritual performances at Ground Zero and pertaining to the memorializing of 9/11 are better understood in terms of an emerging field of scholarship called 'disaster ritual'. Standing in silence, annual memorials, planning a lasting monument to honour the victims, are all characteristics of the phenomena termed disaster ritual behaviour. In *Disaster Ritual: Explorations of an Emerging Ritual Repertoire*, Ron Grimes and others analyze the traces of Christian-liturgical, general religious and profane-secular elements in several case studies that incorporate coalescences of disaster and ritual, such as street

1 Religious tourism, also called 'faith tourism', can be broadly defined as (usually organized) travel to religious sites. The religious aspect focuses on the site(s) visited and not necessarily on the intentions or experiences of the visitors. See Kamil 2000.

riots, the Estonia ferryboat disaster in the Baltic Sea in 1994, and the World Trade Center in 2001 (Post *et al.* 2003).<sup>2</sup> This approach, however, will not overlook the aspects of modern secular and religious pilgrimage associated with visiting Ground Zero.

In this article I will address the following aspects: (1) Even before mid-morning on September 11, the nineteen young men who carried out the attack engaged in rites of mental, spiritual and bodily preparation; their rituals began before Ground Zero became a pilgrimage site. Survivors of the attack also engaged in ritual behaviour. (2) Many of the families and friends of those who perished at Ground Zero got as close as they could to the devastation in a desperate search for missing loved ones, leaving photos and mementos at the site, not unlike remembrances and requests left at religious shrines and gravesites. (3) Thousands of city workers and volunteers spent months at Ground Zero looking for human remains and removing the wreckage. Their part, too, had ritual elements. (4) Entrepreneurs very quickly appeared selling souvenirs and kitsch related to the World Trade Center and the 9/11 disaster. (5) Politicians and public officials made well publicized trips in order to be seen and heard at Ground Zero. That, too, was a form of national civil religion, and accordingly a nondenominational God was invoked in public ceremonies. As soon as the streets adjacent to the site of the devastated Twin Towers were cleared and declared safe, visitors from across America and around the world went to Ground Zero and continue to go, to reflect on the colossal absence in silent awe.

I will begin on a personal note by recalling my own experience of 9/11 as an educator of university students and professor of Islamic Studies, and I will discuss what I call the 'culture of 9/11' as it has evolved, especially in America.<sup>3</sup> Next I will offer definitions of ritual and cognate terms, such as 'rites', 'ritualizing', and the like. Then I want to reflect on the documents left behind by several of the suicide bombers, to understand both their unique religious character as well as their ritual elements. Following that I will turn

2 For an overview, see <http://www.peetersleuven.be/boekoverz.asp?nr=7540> (accessed on 15 October 2009).

3 At the 'Pilgrimage Today' conference at the Donner Institute, Turku, Finland (August 19–21, 2009), it was pointed out by Prof. William S. Sax of the University of Heidelberg, that the American reaction to September 11 and its aftermath was more intense than reactions in Europe and Asia, a point that I readily concede. In what follows, I will focus on the significance of 9/11 and Ground Zero for Americans in general.

to other elements of ritual suggested above—by survivors, workers, visitors to Ground Zero and public figures who exhibited ritualized behaviour.

## Preliminaries and personal observations

I write about these matters not as a specialist in ritual studies. As a historian of religion I am familiar with theories of ritual and ritual studies, particularly in the Muslim world. I have written about Islamic rituals and pilgrimage for encyclopaedias and in my general textbook on Islam (Martin 1996). However, the focus of my scholarly work is not on ritual studies *per se*. This article springs from a slightly different academic background. For several years I have been particularly concerned with what impact the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 has had, or should have had, on my work as an educator and writer, as well as on the students I teach. I will dilate on this point briefly.

In America, by September 12, 2001, many of us were asking: Did 9/11 irrevocably change the world we live in and how we live in it? Was it a tipping point in modern history? Was it perverse evidence that Samuel Huntington's declaration in a famous 1993 article of a 'Clash of Civilizations' had become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and as neo-conservative politicians in Washington have warned ever since?<sup>4</sup> Has it changed the way we define religion and do religious studies? What is my moral obligation as a scholar of Islam in the face of growing public hostility toward Islam and Muslims by some church leaders, politicians, and those, such as Geert Wilders<sup>5</sup> in Holland and David Horowitz<sup>6</sup> in America, who foment hate and mistrust of all Muslims? In response to the Islamophobic discourse coming from the religious and political right in America and Europe, the majority of Islam specialists (most of them non-Muslims themselves) have turned more and more to writing and public speaking in defence of Islam and Muslims. Does our academic obliga-

4 Huntington 1993: 22–49. The article and the quick and sizeable reaction to it was followed by Huntington's book-length rejoinder, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). Akeel Bilgrami argued the case for the 'Clash of Civilizations' could become a self-fulfilling prophecy following September 11 if public policy experts relied on Huntington's shallow understanding of global cultures were relied upon. See Bilgrami's perceptive essay, 'The Clash Within Civilizations' (2003: esp. 88 f.).

5 Geert Wilders's blog is: <http://www.geertwilders.nl/>.

6 David Horowitz's blog is: <http://frontpagemag.com/>. It is linked to Robert Spencer's notorious Jihad Watch: <http://www.jihadwatch.org/>.

tion to conduct unbiased research ever coincide with our moral obligation to speak out against untruths, even if that amounts to presuming to speak ‘for’ Muslims in their defense?

In 1799 Friedrich Schleiermacher published his famous defence of Christianity at the dawn of the Enlightenment, titled *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (in English: *On Christianity: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, published in 1994). Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and especially since 2001, many scholars of Islamic studies, in perhaps an unconscious reflex on Schleiermacher, are openly engaged in a project that might be called: ‘On Islam: Replies to Its Cultured [and Uncultured] Despisers.’ Schleiermacher was, of course, a famous Lutheran pastor and theologian. The new defenders of Islam (of which I have admittedly but cautiously become one) are often non-Muslim scholars teaching in secular and public universities. To put this differently, if scholars in religious studies in America made the defence of Christianity their chief concern, they would rightly be criticized by their colleagues in philosophy, history, and the social sciences, for violating the academic mission of the modern university—they would be accused of doing theology rather than *Religionswissenschaft*, the academic study of religion. Are we skating on thin ice when our scholarly mission becomes devoted to defending a religious tradition from its critics, even when the critique of that religion is vicious and unfounded? This question entails a discussion of ethics in contemporary scholarship which lies outside the scope of this essay, but which I take up in forthcoming book on Muslims and secularism.

## The culture of 9/11

Various kinds of evidence point to the pivotal significance of 9/11 at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Exhibit A: The emotional impact of 9/11 on students. Every year since 2001 I have taught courses on religion and conflict that have tried to deal with these questions. Each class of students has reacted powerfully and emotionally to images and discussions of 9/11. On the morning of September 11, as the planes were attacking the Twin Towers, I was teaching a class of about forty students, some of whose parents and neighbours worked on Wall Street near the World Trade Center. Class time was a crisis time in several ways: some students were understandably fearful for parents and relatives who worked in or near the World Trade Center and left class to try to reach them by cell phone (in vain, given the destruction of towers and relays at the World Trade Center); some were fearful the attacks

might not be over; some were angry and spoke passionately of the need for revenge. An attempt to hold a constructive dialogue gave way to dismissing the class in order to find out more about what was happening. I decided then and ever since that the best way to examine the meaning of September 11 and Ground Zero was to begin classes on Religion and Violence by asking students to talk about their experience of 9/11, to tell their story.

In the first few school terms after 2001, most students were able to narrate their own personal experience on that September 11, although often with emotion (they, too, were in class that Tuesday morning). As the years have passed, the students in my classes each year were younger and younger in 2001; as younger students at the time, they reported being confused about what they thought was happening on 9/11; often teachers, administrators and parents tried to shield them from the nature of it when it first happened. In the spring of 2009 I showed the documentary 'Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero' to my Introduction to Religion class. Most of the students had been in middle school in 2001—ages 11–13. Several of them were moved to tears or rendered speechless by the video images in the documentary and the personal narratives of persons who experienced 9/11 directly in NYC.<sup>7</sup> Raw fears, even when they are diminished by the passage of time, can still be evoked in many young people in America by images and video footage of 9/11 and its aftermath.

If we turn our attention to literature and public discourse, I offer as 'Exhibit B' that 9/11 and the events that took place at Ground Zero are deeply embedded in what especially North American scholars of religion teach and write about. Three or four years ago I began to notice a curious fact as I was trying to keep up with journal articles and new books in Islamic and religious studies published each year. Virtually every book and article on Islam and even more generally on religion or other religions—published in America in 2002 and after—cited September 11, 2001 in the opening paragraph of the introduction.<sup>8</sup> Reference to 9/11 became a necessary incipient *raison d'être* to introduce the study of religion in the twenty-first century. This of course has been less true in Europe. However, coming to terms with 9/11 has not been entirely absent in works by European, Middle Eastern and Asian scholars. There is

7 A 2002 two-hour documentary produced by Frontline for Public Broadcasting System, directed by Helen Whitney. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/faith/> (last viewed on 20 October 2009).

8 Recent works published in Europe and the Muslim world less frequently feature mention of the destruction of the World Trade Center as a factor that bears upon writing about religion in the twenty-first century.



some, perhaps postmodern, sense in which, when we now talk about religion, or indeed the contemporary world more generally, we are talking about a political, social and cultural environment that has different cultural and political DNA from the world in which North American scholars of religion did their scholarly work during the last decades of the twentieth century.

Finally, let me offer as 'Exhibit C', reference to 9/11 in popular fiction—novels and short stories—that have appeared since 2002. Much of twenty-first century fiction by authors from South and West Asia is about cross-cultural and multicultural conflicts—Indians, Pakistanis, Arabs and others trying to make the transition from traditional life in the old country to modern life in the new world. Fiction by Western authors, Americans in particular, written in the same period, frequently incorporate the episode of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath into their narratives. Artists are often able to probe more deeply into the psychological effects of events than scholars normally attempt to do, by putting the discourse in first- or third-person narrative, where feelings, conflicting emotions, and moral dilemmas emerge to reveal the human dimension of a story. My first encounter with a fictional reference to 9/11 was in British novelist Nicholas Mosley's surrealistic tale, *Inventing God* (2003). The title is a reference to Voltaire's famous dictum: 'If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him.' The novel ends with an oblique reference to September 11 in New York, which is left hanging as to what it meant and what is next—much as were, perhaps, many people globally. The action is set mostly in the Middle East—where God was, if not invented, he was at least claimed by each of the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—as its own. The narrative—often disjointedly describing what the characters are perceiving and understanding to be and take place in phenomenal reality—follows Jewish, Christian, Muslim, secular and mystical players. At one point in the narrative, one the main protagonists, Dario, is musing over some recent entries in his diary that telegraph and comment on the vague reference to the disaster of 9/11 at the end of the novel:

Towards the end of the twentieth century when it was realized that many of the old certainties and ideals were blowing away and people were groping after them like children with gas balloons gone on the wind—

—no more communion, no more fascism, no more God as an old retainer in the sky whom one could tell what to tell one to do—

—towers built up towards heaven coming crashing down, and each person talking, talking, complaining in a different language and putting the blame on others—. (Mosley 2003: 168.)

For Mosley, as for many Christian writers, struggling with the relevance of religion in post-Enlightenment Europe, the destruction of the Twin Towers was a reflex on the fall of the Tower of Babel, the symbol of human arrogance and *hübris*.

In a somewhat different, more realistic narrative that is nonetheless symbolic, Don DeLillo's 2007 novel, *Falling Man*, opens with a third person narrative description of the main character, Bill Lawton, running with the thousands of others as the Twin Towers are falling. Let's follow the opening narrative a few lines:

It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. . .

The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall. This WAS the world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets and turning corners, busting around corners, seismic tides of smoke, with office paper flashing past, standard sheets with cutting edge, skimming, shipping past, otherworldly things in the morning pall.

. . . The world was this as well, figures in windows a thousand feet up, dropping into free space, and the stink of fuel fire, and the ready zip of sirens in the air. The noise lay everywhere they ran, stratified sound collecting around them, and he walked away from it and into it at the same time.

And then, in the closing lines of this brief opening chapter, DeLillo tells of a utility truck pulling up alongside Lawton just moments after the second Tower, the North Tower, had collapsed, and he and other survivors had reached a clearing of sorts, where they paused briefly to decide where to flee next:

[T]he driver leaned toward the window on the passenger's side and examined what he saw, a man scaled in ash, in pulverized matter, and asked him where he wanted to go. It wasn't until he got into the truck and shut the door that he understood where he had been going all along. (DeLillo 2007: 3–6 *passim*.)

A final example from recent American fiction is the novel *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer (2005).<sup>9</sup> Foer, known for his post-modern approach to fiction called ‘visual writing’ (many of the pages are photos or drawings that mark out themes in the text) makes a nine-year-old boy, Oskar Schell, his protagonist and main narrator. Oskar lives with his parents in an upper-floor apartment building in Manhattan, across the street from his grandmother, whose apartment he can see from his window. As the novel opens two years after 2001, we learn that in the World Trade Center disaster Oskar lost his father, with whom he was very close and interactive in ways that seem quite precocious, for example, his father would present puzzles and mind-twisting treasure hunts that Oskar loved to pursue. The key to understanding his missing father is literally a key that Oskar finds in a vase his father had acquired shortly before 9/11, and the search for what it opens is the last puzzle his father inadvertently left him with to solve. It takes him to dozens of strangers in New York who might possess what his father’s key unlocks. We also learn that his paternal grandparents had experienced another disaster in the bombing of Dresden. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* deftly shows how unique and personally felt disaster events such as 9/11 and the Dresden bombing were, and yet how interconnected these deep, individual experiences are with other people, even strangers.

Some of the most penetrating creative writing about 9/11 has been by Muslim authors from the Middle East, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Their stories of life in the West, particularly America, during the first decade of the twenty-first century make clear that the Muslim-American experience of 9/11 and its aftermath has differed from the Euro-American experience. Arissa Illahi, the protagonist in Shaila Abdullah’s 2009 novel, *Saffron Dreams*, is a hijab-wearing Pakistani woman who has a traditional marriage to Faizan, a young Pakistani man who emigrates to NY in part to pursue a dream to become a writer. Arissa accompanies her new husband to New York where he takes a job as a waiter in the ‘Top of the World’ restaurant on the uppermost floor of the World Trade Center. He was working on the morning of 9/11 along with 3,000 other employees and visitors from the New York area and around the world. The story opens with Arissa widowed by the collapse of the North Tower; we also learn that she is pregnant with his child who will be born with a rare disease and disability—a personal misfortune which she accepts as a welcome surviving legacy compounded with the disaster visited

9 I am indebted to Ruth Illman of Åbo Akademi University for calling Foer’s novel to my attention and indeed presenting me with her copy of it.

upon thousands of others. Although her Muslim husband was a victim of the September 11 attacks, she is treated as a terrorist by neighbours and strangers alike for no other reason than that she has the same religion as those who piloted the planes into the Twin Towers and that she wears a Muslim head covering. The banner for the book reads: 'You don't know you're a misfit until you are marked as an outcast.' Her story of crossing borders, from traditional Muslim to secular American society, and trying to negotiate her cultural and religious identity in the strange new world of twenty-first century America, reflects the experience of many Muslims living in Europe and America. That 9/11 played a direct role in the fictional life of Arissa Illahi was also true for the many Muslims in real life who lost loved ones in the collapse of the Towers on September 11, or became victims of hate crimes against Muslims, or anyone who looked like they were Muslim, in the immediate social need to blame and punish those perceived to be the enemy. This, too, was a part of the culture of 9/11.

With this background on several ways in which September 11 has had an impact on scholarship, education, personal identity narratives, and the arts and literature, let me move on to pilgrimage and ritual at Ground Zero. What do such terms as 'rite,' 'ritual,' and 'ritualizing' mean in the context of Ground Zero at the site of the collapsed World Trade Center Towers and the thousands of people from around the globe who continue to visit that site?

## Defining ritual and the ritualization response

In 1974, the Chicago historian of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith, delivered a lecture at Pomona College in California, later published under the title 'The Bare Facts of Ritual' (Smith 1982: 53–62). In it he speculated that

*ritual represents a controlled environment where the variables (i.e., the accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced precisely because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful. Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension with the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of events.* (Smith 1982: 63, italics in the original.)

This definition of ritual as a human performance that attempts to address the incongruity of the way things are with the way things ought to be has had considerable influence on historians of religion who specialize in ritual stud-

ies, including those who are critical of Smith's overall theory of ritual, such as Ronald L. Grimes (1990, 2006b). In *Ritual and Its Consequences*, Adam B. Seligman (*et al.* 2000) holds that ritual creates a subjunctive universe. Seligman argues in the same vein as Smith that in ritual we juxtapose a 'what if' world to an 'as is' world. Ritual allows humans to live with ambiguity; it is a way to create coherence out of ambiguity. He offers as an example the rite of grieving for his mother when the *Kaddish* prayer was recited, in which she was remembered in formulaic fond and loving terms: a perfect daughter, wife, mother and friend. He compared that to the fact of how difficult she had been to live with in many moments of real life.<sup>10</sup> We ritualize in order to heal and to reorder the disorder of the real world.

For Grimes, 'ritual' is a generic term that denotes 'the general idea of actions characterized by a certain "family" of qualities, for instance, that they are performed, formalized, patterned, and so on' (Grimes 2006b: 163, note 32). For Grimes and many theorists, virtually any behaviour, animal and human, can be ritualized. He defines 'rite' as 'sequences of action rendered special by virtue of their condensation, elevation, or stylization. Rites are distinct, socially recognized set (sic) of procedures. Often they are named as well as enacted, in set-aside times and specially chosen places.' (Grimes 2006: 163.)

Grimes's definition of ritualizing is useful: 'The word "ritualizing" refers to the activity of deliberately cultivating rites.' He distinguishes between 'ritual' and 'ritualizing' by pointing out that the '-izing' ending of the word ritualizing is 'a deliberate attempt to suggest a process, a quality of nascence or emergence. Ritualizing is the act of cultivating or inventing rites.' He makes the further point that ritualizing is not always socially condoned. 'Rather, it happens on the margins; therefore it is alternately stigmatized and eulogized.' (Grimes 1982: 10.) In other words, what we do when we ritualize is often *time* or *place* or *event* specific, such as preparing oneself to enact a suicide bombing, or pausing for a moment of silent prayer when one looks with awe upon the cavity in the ground that once was the imposing World Trade Center complex. Visiting Ground Zero differs from the traditional religious pilgrimages, such as the annual Hajj to Mecca, which local Muslim communities around the world also celebrate in the Feast of the Sacrifice; or the passion play at Easter time, in which Christians around the world can participate through local Easter celebrations. We recognize ritual when we see a priest blessing the

10 Seligman discussed his thesis and this example at a colloquium at Emory University, in February 2009.

cup of wine at the altar during the mass, but in our daily routines, we ritualize much more than sacramental and religious rites.

With these definitions as guidelines, we turn now to the consideration of Ground Zero as a site of pilgrimage and ritual.

### **Ritualizing the attack**

Pilgrimage-like visits to Ground Zero and the ceremonial remembrances—both religious and secular—began as spontaneous forms of ritualized behaviour, and they began almost immediately after September 11, although for several weeks the mourners and visitors were not allowed to approach Ground Zero itself, for health, safety and security reasons.

As suggested above, however, one must back up a year, perhaps even longer, to begin to comprehend the rituals and ritualized behaviour that led to 9/11. The scholar of ritual must recognize the ritualized behaviour of the 19 hijackers who sought martyrdom in the event of 9/11. Although the information on what transpired during the months the hijackers were preparing and being prepared for their task is still rather sparse, two versions of the text exist that guided them through purity rites, prayers and psychological preparation from the night of September 10 through the next morning up to boarding the plane and taking command of it. The text has deep resonances with Muslim rituals of bodily cleansing, prayer and animal sacrifice despite the sharp incongruity of the attack on the World Trade Center with the normative performance of Muslim rites of purification, prayer and sacrifice.

It will no doubt seem perverse to some people to link the rites of those who carried out the attack at the World Trade Center with the rites of those who survived and were memorialized at Ground Zero. Nonetheless, the scope of my topic—pilgrimage and ritualizing at Ground Zero—necessarily includes the rituals that brought 19 young Muslim martyrs to their death along with the victims in the three planes and those who perished at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and in the third plane that crashed in a field in Pennsylvania (falling short of its intended target—probably the White House or the Capital Building in Washington, DC). The relationship of rites of martyrs and victims exemplifies what philosopher Charles Taylor, in another context, refers to as an *internal dyad*—a pair of elements in relational opposition: up implies down, inside implies an outside (Taylor 2009: 1144 ff.). Thus, Taylor explains, in pre-modern times (in European and Western societies) the religious dimension of life was comprehended in terms of its opposite—the world, the

*secular*—and vice versa. In modern times, Taylor avers, the secular can be comprehended on its own without reference to the religious; the religious and the secular have become, in modern times, an *external dyad*; they have lost their religious reciprocity.

The dyadic relationship is often cited in social science analyses. The relationship of martyrs to victims on September 11 can be construed as an internal dyadic relationship. That neither martyrs nor victims knew personally nor wanted to know each other, does not negate the necessary relation of each to the other. For the purposes of ritual analysis, suicide martyrs and their victims should be treated as existing in an internal dyadic relationship. Exploration of the reciprocal ritual relationship between attackers and victims, symbolized by Ground Zero, lies beyond the scope of this article; however, it is a topic that invites further reflection and analysis. The analysis in this article continues with a brief consideration of the ritualizing dimensions expressed in the documents that guided the hijackers through the last few hours as they prepared for September 11.

## Ritualizing at Ground Zero

Religious, and indeed ritual, preparation for war and for violence against enemies is well established in the history of religions.<sup>11</sup> In the Book of Joshua in the Hebrew Bible, Joshua is commanded by God to prepare flint knives and to make the Israelites a circumcised people again in readiness for the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 5:2). The enemies of the Israelites (and the Lord) are regarded as vulnerable to attack because the God of the Israelites is on their side (see Harris *et al.* 2000: 40 ff.; see also Aho 1981). More recently during the war in Iraq, there have been several reports of prayer and other modes of religious preparation and construal of the war in a Christian evangelical framework. Such was the case, but with reference to Muslim ritual behaviour, also for the martyr-attackers on September 11, 2001.

In his preface to one of the more insightful studies of 9/11, University of Chicago historian of religion, Bruce Lincoln, states:

[T]he most pressing item [for the scholar] to ponder was the extent to which the attacks of September 11 could be considered religious. My ini-

11 I am indebted to Michael Pye for reminding me that ritual preparation for death in war is very old and widely practiced in human cultures.

tial attempt involved a close reading of four key texts: the instructions that Muhammad Atta and others studied the last days of their lives. . . , speeches given by George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden as military action commenced in Afghanistan on October 7. . . , and the interpretations of September 11 offered by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson immediately thereafter. . . (Lincoln 2003: ix.)<sup>12</sup>

In his analysis of the English language translation of Muhammad Atta's instructions and preparations for 9/11 found in personal belongings he left in his car in Boston, Lincoln points out that this text, which guided the hijacker/martyrs the last hours before the end, curiously makes only vague allusions to the actual target and the result they will bring about. It is a strange and surreal text. An anonymous author, who is never identified, guides them in the performances they will enact to attain martyrdom. Specifics, such as the passengers to be killed on the plane and in the World Trade Center and Pentagon are only alluded to; it is a document that stresses purity, prayer and ritual acts. The instructions begin with an invocation to God.<sup>13</sup> Next follows a section called 'The Last Night', in which the hijacker/martyrs are instructed to purify their bodies by removing excess body hair, bathing, and applying cologne. Then, the soon-to-be martyrs are told the last night is a time for spiritual preparation, Qur'an reading and reflection, and to review their task ahead on the next day. The 'Second Step' jumps forward to the following morning—getting to the airport and through the airport, its checks, securities, and secular spaces. The anonymous author of the document admonishes the hijackers to keep their concentration as they make their way through the airport by constantly saying appropriate prayers and supplications. Toward the end of the document, the young men are admonished: 'Do not seem confused or show signs of nervous tension. Be happy, optimistic, calm, because you are heading for a deed that God loves and will accept. It will be the day, God willing, you

12 The Robertson broadcast was aired on the Christian Broadcasting Network program '700 Club' on September 13; see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-CACdta\\_8I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-CACdta_8I) (last viewed on 11 January 2010).

13 The papers identified as the instructions to the hijackers in preparing for and carrying out their martyrdom September 11, 2001 (found in the personal remains of two hijackers but perhaps originally in the possession of all of them) apparently in Muhammad Atta's case was a compilation of the header page of his last will and testament (a statement to family and friends when preparing for death) and the main body of the instructions for the 9/11 event. See Campo 2003.



spend with the women of paradise.’ (§24 in the translation cited by Lincoln in Appendix A.)

The section labelled ‘The Third and Final Phase’ covers boarding the plane and what must be done in it. One is to enter the plane with prayer and supplication and remain in a prayerful state until the plane takes off. It then refers to the moment in the air when the ‘two groups’ come together, referring to those who will pilot the plane and those who will take physical control of the passengers and crew in the main cabin. Throughout the instructions the events of that fateful day are compared to and interpreted by reference to well-known events in the life of the Prophet as he fought to establish his religion in Mecca and Medina. Those they are attacking are likened to infidels and backsliders and followers of Satan; their world—the world of the victims—is also likened to the time of *Jahilyyah* (the time of moral and spiritual ignorance before the Prophet came).

The hijacker/martyrs were instructed and trained to participate in what is clearly a ritualized event. It was not a set of ordinary instructions such as, ‘go to the end of the block, then turn left to the traffic light, then look for a tall building, etc. . . .’ All throughout the document are calls for preparations of ritual purity, strategically placed Qur’an citations, allusions to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and prayers and supplications that every Muslim would recognize. However, the attack on the World Trade Center was not a canonical Islamic rite, such as the *‘Id* of the Sacrifice, celebrated during the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. It was the sort of rite that Grimes identified above as a performance on the margins, liable from different points of view to be ‘stigmatized or eulogized,’ depending on one’s moral, cultural and religious horizon of understanding. 9/11 has the guise of orthodox Muslim ritualization. Yet the overwhelming majority of Muslims do not accept, indeed firmly reject, the mission on which these young men were sent as an Islamic duty or divinely sanctioned deed. It was a concatenation of familiar ritual elements to effect what, from an orthodox Islamic point of view, was a most unfamiliar and terrible result. Many would protest that the complex of activities the hijacker-martyrs performed was not Islamic, indeed, the antithesis of Islam. However, the historian of religion cannot but recognize the performances of the hijacker-martyrs as *religious* as well as the ritual elements in their performances.

## Pilgrimage and ritualization at Ground Zero

In June of 2002, I had my first glimpse of Ground Zero, the site of the devastation of the World Trade Center in New York just nine months previously. I was there with my 16-year-old daughter for what had become for us an annual pilgrimage to New York each year after school was out, to visit museums and enjoy New York. The total destruction of the two giant towers and of everyone left in them when the buildings collapsed was still being cleared away. A fence had been hastily erected around the site. Across the street from the fenced-off ruination, the sidewalk was jammed with a jumble of hastily assembled mementos, photos of the missing, American flags, models of the Twin Towers, t-shirts and baseball caps of the NYFD and NYPD commemorating the firemen and policemen who had lost their lives on September 11. Relatives and loved ones had left photos and remembrances of the dead, and vendors were retailing kitsch—cheap and gaudy mementos of the event of 9/11.

The scene reminded me of visits to saints' shrines and tombs in Egypt and Pakistan. There, too, one finds kitsch—sacred and secular—for sale by vendors as well as gifts and remembrances left by pilgrims and tourists for the saint whose relics sanctify the shrine. Along with Qur'ans, hagiographies of the saint(s) enshrined in the mosque, Qur'anic calligraphy on wall hangings, and posters of the ninety-nine beautiful names of God were miniature stuffed Santa Clauses and dolls, posters of famous actors, and the like in a sacred/secular brew of souvenirs for pilgrims and tourists coming to the site.

So much at Ground Zero seems familiar to the historian of religions: The solemn throngs of visitors undifferentiated as to social rank by religious, racial, and national identities; the ceremonies of remembrance on the anniversary of September 11; the sacred remembrances left and souvenirs purchased. This much bespeaks of pilgrimage and what Muslims know as *ziyara*, or visiting the shrines of saints. Yet such a comparison seems far-fetched. The World Trade Center had been the site of global trade and finance, not religion or religious activities. It had been a place drenched in the secular concerns of Wall Street. Most of the visitors were clad in the clothing of modern tourists—blue jeans, short pants and t-shirts and blouses; they did not remove their shoes, or even their baseball caps and hats. Except for the occasional clerical collars of priests and the habits of nuns, or the turbans of Asian Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, no religious or special vestments or attire was worn.

No organized special activities mark off the visit to Ground Zero from other tourist and public gatherings in New York, such as at Times Square. In a strict sense of religious pilgrimage, Ground Zero was and is *not* a pilgrimage

site; visiting Ground Zero is not a pilgrimage performance, in the same sense that going on Hajj to Mecca, or following the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, or the stations traversed by Buddhist pilgrims in Shikoku and Saikoku, Japan—to name just three of scores of religious pilgrimage sites that continue to draw visitors in modern times. Nonetheless, visiting Ground Zero is not exactly *not* a modern pilgrimage. The observer does notice a certain aura of reverence and awe, especially in the early years following 9/11, among those who came to pray, ponder, and peregrinate around among the souvenirs and posters that surrounded the empty pit that once was the site of the Twin Towers.

The religious rituals that were generated in response to 9/11 and the smoking, hoary aftermath of the attack at Ground Zero with its pall of death and absence were far less durable and perennial than the stuff that structures the well-known pilgrimages in most world religions. Nonetheless, ritual is found in the images that surrounded 9/11, much of it on the Internet and in performances of clergy and poets and firemen who confronted Ground Zero directly in the awful moments that immediately followed the attacks. Many visitors who came later to stand at Ground Zero and reflect on the immensity of what had happened no doubt had struggled with the image of what the victims had had to do, for example, confront the vertiginous dread of having to have jumped from above the 86th floor—into what? Was it simply a desperate nihilistic act? Yet many have noticed that often the divers reached out and held hands—reaching out to link with the palpable humanity in the hand of a friend or a little-known office colleague. Perhaps many visitors had read, heard, or heard about the last messages sent to loved ones from passengers on the doomed aircraft once they knew their fate. Those images did generate ritualized responses to 9/11 and Ground Zero. Those and other images like them dominated my mind when I first stood at Ground Zero in the late spring of 2002, and I suspect they have for the tens of thousands of pilgrim-visitors who have stood and silently mingled there since. I will close with brief descriptions of two ritualized responses to 9/11 and Ground Zero that are quite moving. Both were captured on video and narrated on the Frontline production of ‘Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero.’<sup>14</sup>

*The Remains.* The atomized remains of the victims in Twin Towers of the World Trade Center did not amount to much, but those small pieces of human bodies and artefacts were deeply significant, to family and friends, as well as

14 From the transcript of the television production, found at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/faith/etc/script.html> (viewed on 17 January 2010).

to the rescue workers and firemen who worked to clear Ground Zero in the days, weeks and months following 9/11. The removal process was structured by first being careful to find human remains, long after any hope of finding anyone alive was past. What kind of funerary rites would be appropriate in conditions where the identity of the victim could not be immediately determined from a minute piece of flesh and when DNA testing would take days or weeks? New York photographer Joel Meyerowitz was struck by the task of removal that fell to rescue workers, prying day after day through the rubble to find and remove the gruesome remains of the victims. He describes what he saw one day when he visited ground Zero:

I was down there at a moment that they were finding a larger number of remains. And coming up the ranks were six firemen carrying a little sled, draped with a flag. Every single person took off their helmet, put it over their heart, saluted, did this traditional American gesture of respect for the dead, and there was no one to do it for. There was no press. It wasn't a public demonstration. It was for the dead. And they did it over and over again.

But that weighs on them. That—it's a reminder because they have to put that—that remains on that sled. They have to handle that. And some of the remains are beyond words. (Transcript, Act Five, 'Ground Zero')

*Litany of Love.* Conservative New York rabbi Irwin Kula was deeply touched by the poetry, the simple statements of love and human connectedness expressed in last statements on cell phones from victims on the airplanes hurtling toward their fates. Commenting on what 9/11 evoked in his religious consciousness, he spoke candidly:

My genuine experience of life is that there is nothing out there, this is all there is. And when you see the seamlessness of it all, that's what I mean by God. Every tradition has that. Every morning, three times a day since I'm 6 years old, 5 years old, I've been saying, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.' Right? It's one of our few creedal statements, right, the Shema. Three times a day since I'm 6 years old.

And 9/11, I guess—if you ask me what did 9/11 really do, it made me understand the truth of that, that the truth of that, everything is one. Not that there's some guy hanging out there who has it all together, who we call One, but that it is all one.

We all know it deep down! We've all had those experiences, whether it's looking at our child in a crib, or whether it's looking at our lover or looking at a mountaintop or looking at a sunset, right? We've all had those experiences when we recognize, 'Whoa! We're much more connected here.' That's what those firemen had. They recognized. Now, they didn't have time to think about it, right, because actually, if you think about it, you begin to create separations. They didn't think about it. All they knew was we're absolutely connected. We're absolutely connected to the 86th floor.

For Rabbi Kula, the litany form of the chanting ancient sacred text is reapplied to the modern texts of cell phone last expressions of impending death and last good byes to loved ones:

Rabbi Brian Kula: [Singing—(in the manner of a rabbinical chant)] Hey, Jules. It's Brian. I'm on the plane and it's hijacked, and it doesn't look good. I just wanted to let you know that I love you and I hope to see you again.

[Commenting] These are final conversations that were recorded on cell phones, recorded on voicemail. They're so pure about the expression of love between husband and wife, between mother and child. They seem to me to be incredible texts because they were at the moment of confronting life or death. And for me, I chant these every single morning because they remind me that whatever my tradition is about, it's about this.

[Singing] Mommy, the building is on fire. There's smoke coming through the walls. I can't breathe. I love you, Mommy. Goodbye.

[Commenting] The real Torah, the real wisdom, the real religious tradition, the real experience behind religion, is about love and is about connection and is no more complicated than that.

[Singing] Honey, something terrible is happening. I don't think I'm going to make it. I love you. Take care of the children. (Transcript, Act 2, 'The Face of God'.)

These final examples of ritualization at Ground Zero, and there are many others, are isolated and do not quite form a structured pattern recognizable to the historian of religion as a pilgrimage. They do not amount to a durable

tradition of performance that marks visits to the site of the former World Trade Center as a pilgrimage qua religious pilgrimage. Yet the place and the event that Ground Zero evokes and symbolizes have drawn people from far and wide to that site for over seven years at the time of this writing. Ritualized behaviour at Ground Zero is in response to a disaster of huger proportions for most Americans and others. Ground Zero was a place that had to be ritualized. The story of that process may have a shelf life, but it seems to be far from over. What people have done at Ground Zero in response to 9/11 needs to be observed and analyzed by historians of religions and scholars of ritual studies, as well as novelists, artists, and all thoughtful people living in the twenty-first century.

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## Foot-Pilgrims and Backpackers

### Contemporary ways of travelling

#### Introduction

This article deals with two modern forms of travelling, which both have developed into boom industries over the last 25 years: the foot pilgrimage along the *Camino Francés* to *Santiago de Compostela* in Spain and journeys along so called backpacker's trails. Whereas the label of 'pilgrim' is still mostly associated with devotional persons leaving home out of purely religious motives, young people taking to the road as 'backpackers' are generally perceived as pleasure seeking globetrotters. However, the intention of this essay is to break with these stereotypes and to work out some of the major similarities between what at first glance appear as two entirely different ways of travelling. Although there do exist some studies about the relations between pilgrimages and tourism,<sup>1</sup> nobody, as yet, seems to have focussed particularly on the similarities between foot-pilgrims and backpackers.

The idea of studying these two peculiar forms of travelling arises, on the one hand, from my own long-term backpacking experience, comprising almost a decade, and on the other hand, from over nine months of field research that I conducted along the *Shikoku Henro* pilgrimage in Japan, which resulted in the ethnographic documentary film *Arukihenro*.<sup>2</sup> Comparing the outcomes of my studies in Japan with literature about the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and about backpacking generally, I not only came across many parallels and similarities between these two pilgrimages with completely different cultural and religious backgrounds, but also between the religious connotations ascribed to pilgrimages and the perceived secular character of backpacking travels.

1 See, for example, Graburn 1989, Smith 1992, Rinschede 1992, Badone & Roseman 2004, Timothy & Olsen 2006, and Swatos 2006.

2 *Arukihenro—Walking Pilgrims*. Documentary film, Tiger Toda Productions 2006. 73 min, OV/e. For more information, see [www.tigertoda.ch](http://www.tigertoda.ch).



The present article gives a short overview of my ongoing research, which involves field research along the *Camino Francés* in Spain and along backpacker's trails in South-East Asia applying audio-visual methods, with the aim to present the conclusions in a scientific documentary film.<sup>3</sup> Having just returned from the field in Spain, the paper at hand is still predominantly based on literature from other scholars and only to a lesser extent on my own empirical findings.

I will begin by defining the terms 'foot-pilgrims' and 'backpackers' as a first step before elucidating the development of the current travelling boom. Second, I shall delineate a theoretical basis, referring to Victor Turner's conceptions, and work out a structural frame for both foot-pilgrimages and backpacker's travels. The final part of this article will then discuss the similarities between foot-pilgrims and backpackers, regarding the protagonists, the pre-conditions, the motives, the practices *en route* and the aftermath within the proposed travelling structure.

## Definitions

'A tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (Turner & Turner 1978: 20). This oft quoted sentence implies that pilgrims are externally almost indistinguishable from ordinary voyagers and that the borderlines regarding their aims, structures and motives are blurred. Accordingly, pilgrimages are, and always have been, frequently undertaken in combination with touristic interests, such as visits to historical or cultural spots, and experiences of nature, adventure and sport. Similarly, touristically motivated journeys usually include religious places such as churches, temples and sacred sites. Current discussions of pilgrimages include localities and landscapes with spiritual importance for indigenous people, like *Ayers Rock* in Australia (Digance 2003: 143 ff.), as well as sites of religious significance of past cultures, like *Glastonbury* in the UK or *Sedona* in the USA, which have recently been enjoying a revival, especially among new religious groups (Reader 2007: 213). Furthermore, there are pilgrimages to non-religiously associated locations such as the graveyards of famous people or war victims, disaster sites, as well as to monuments of

3 Additional information about the project, see <http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/p10661.htm>.

cultural and national importance.<sup>4</sup> These implicitly religious-associated pilgrimages often form part of a touristic itinerary as well.

With regard to 'foot-pilgrims' and 'backpackers', we are dealing with two particular sub-groups of pilgrims and tourists, respectively. In order to work out the similarities between these travelling modes, it is first of all essential to define both terms. This is a difficult task however, since neither foot-pilgrims nor backpackers form an explicitly homogeneous group. Both are dynamic phenomena, continuously influenced by historical, socio-cultural, economic and political factors. I consider, therefore, a universal definition to be redundant and instead propose, as a heuristic definition for both terms, the self-perception and the peer recognition of the protagonists.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in what follows I would like to stress certain general determining factors relating to these two ways of travelling, which are important for the later discussion.

Regarding the pilgrims along the Camino Francés, it makes sense to distinguish between walkers and cyclists, and accordingly motorised pilgrims, whether individuals or groups, who have their baggage transported by a vehicle. This is significant insofar as foot-pilgrims often distance themselves from the above mentioned other means of transport, labelling themselves 'authentic' with reference to the traditional ways of medieval pilgrims. Two major facts distinguishing foot-pilgrims from other pilgrims are the physical and mental efforts involved, as well as the need for a large amount of time to cope with the long distance. In connection with the duration, walking pilgrims can get divided into long-term, part-time and even weekend pilgrims. By long-term walking pilgrims I refer to people who walk, continuously, at least from *Pamplona* to Santiago de Compostela, a distance of around 730 kilometres, taking approximately one month to walk. Part-time pilgrims often do week-long stretches, whilst weekend pilgrims limit themselves to even shorter stages. When using the term 'foot-pilgrims' in this article, I am referring to long-term walkers who carry their own luggage. Focusing on this group is significant, because it involves a daily pace and practice on the road

4 See some detailed examples in Reader & Walter 1993, Coleman & Eade 2004, Dubisch & Winkelmann 2005, and Reader 2007.

5 During the recent field-research along the Camino in Spain I came across a few informants who either declared themselves not to be pilgrims, or who were uncertain whether to call themselves pilgrims, although they all walked along the same route over an equal time performing identical daily procedures. From the perspective of their fellow walkers, however, as well as of the local people, they were clearly perceived to be foot-pilgrims, who similarly took advantage of the inexpensive infrastructure along the way.

that implies meeting the same fellow pilgrims over and over again for several days or even weeks.

Just as the travelling style of what is nowadays called ‘backpacking’ has changed over the last four decades, so has the terminology which is used in scholarly discourse: from *drifter* (Cohen 1972), *wanderer* (Vogt 1976) and *budget traveller* (Riley 1988) to *hybrid-tourist* (Rotpart 1995). The term *backpacker* has only become established in scientific literature in the last few years, reflecting the contemporary self-designation of the protagonists themselves. The latter deliberately distance themselves from more organized forms of tourism, such as package tourists and consider their travelling style to be ‘real’ (Riley 1988: 322; Sørensen 2003: 858), with early explorers or the founders of the *Hippie trail* as role-models in mind.<sup>6</sup> The criteria for this distinction are concerned less with the journey’s destination, since touristic highlights are frequented by all tourists, and more with the duration as well as mode and practice on the road. Most backpackers travel for several weeks or months, since their budget is usually limited and the airfares to their starting and return destinations occasion the highest costs. As a result, mostly local and inexpensive overland means of transport are preferred, as well as low-priced accommodation. Furthermore, an individually designed and flexible travel itinerary, the desire to meet fellow backpackers and extraordinary activities along the journey are strong aspirations (Binder 2005: 27).

This briefly summarizes the major characteristics of the terms ‘foot-pilgrims’ and ‘backpackers’, applied as heuristic categories in this article. Interestingly enough, both phenomena emerged, or, better, re-emerged at almost the same period of time, as I will now elucidate.

## Development and boom

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela first arose in the eleventh century as a European phenomenon, and reached its initial culmination in the twelfth century. With the exceptions of two revivals in the fifteenth and seventeenth century, the pilgrimage’s importance and the numbers of pilgrims steadily declined after that initial period.<sup>7</sup> It was not until the nationalistic politics of

6 One of the immediate origins of backpacking can be seen in the large quantities of European youths travelling overland to Asia in the 1960s, on a journey generally called the *Hippie Trail*. For further details see next section.

7 For details about the history of the Camino see Frey 2002: 323 ff.; Herbers 2006, and Windisch 2008: 41 ff.

Francisco Franco and the development of the Spanish tourist industry in the 1950s and 1960s that the pilgrimage was protected as a part of medieval cultural heritage and actively propagandized. In the course of this reactivation, the first pilgrims travelled by cars and buses to Santiago de Compostela and later, after the mapping of the medieval footpaths from the 1960s onwards, sporadically some individuals started to walk along the historical paths in the direction of St James' tomb again. Nonetheless, the actual development started in the late 1980s and developed to a fully-fledged boom at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Whereas in 1987 only 2,905 people walked the pilgrimage, the numbers climbed continually and reached a figure of 125,141 in the year 2008, including a steady growth of different nationalities.<sup>8</sup> This explosion can be explained by the persistent promotion and support of the pilgrimage, not least by the European Union. In 1987 the *Camino de Santiago* was declared as the first European Cultural Route and in 1993 listed as one of UNESCO's World Heritage sites. Not only have the roads and the infrastructure been constantly improved, so also has media interest grown steadily. Countless books, articles, diaries, reportages, films and websites about the *Camino* sprang up, alongside internet forums and blogs affording the pilgrims a means of exchange and an arena in which to stimulate the diffusion of the walking idea. This latter point is also of considerable interest regarding the development of backpacker's travels.<sup>9</sup>

Just as the medieval pilgrim stands as a role model for the contemporary foot-pilgrims along the Camino, so also the twenty-first century backpacker is still influenced by the image and attributes of the first European discoverers (O'Reilly 2006: 1003): the brave adventurer travelling to unfamiliar territories

8 [http://www.americanpilgrims.com/camino/statistics\\_docs\\_images/compostelas\\_by\\_year\\_090226.pdf](http://www.americanpilgrims.com/camino/statistics_docs_images/compostelas_by_year_090226.pdf) or <http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statiko1.htm> (both accessed on 30 November 2009). These numbers have to be interpreted with caution because they come from the pilgrims' office in Santiago de Compostela and are based on the issued Compostelas, the official documents confirming one's pilgrimage. The numbers include cyclist pilgrims as well, and besides Compostelas are issued to everybody who can prove to have walked only the last hundred kilometres. As a consequence, the numbers of what I term walking pilgrims are much smaller, although continually increasing as well.

9 Of particular relevance to Santiago pilgrims are Paulo Coelho: *O Diário de um Mago* (1987), Shirley MacLaine: *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* (2000), Hape Kerkeling: *Ich bin dann mal weg – Meine Reise auf dem Jakobsweg* (2006), Coline Serreau's film *Saint-Jacques...La Mecque* (2005) and the German TV-soap *Das grosse Promi-Pilgern* (2007). Concerning backpackers, see Jack Kerouac: *On the Road* (1957), Alex Garland: *The Beach* (1996) as well as different titles and websites specified by O'Reilly 2006: 1011.

for several months, far from one's home country being responsible for one-self, discovering new places and peoples, confronting dangers, reaching one's physical and mental limits and returning with a wealth of experience. From this point of view, the roots of backpacking reach back quite far in history. Whilst Judith Adler (1985: 335 ff.) points out a range of precursors of the modern backpacker; such as the *grand tourist* of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the journeymen of the nineteenth century and the *hobos* of the 1930s, the immediate forerunners are generally seen as the drifter described by Erik Cohen (1972: 164 ff.). Influenced by the Hippie ideals of the 1960s and the alternative movements of the early 1970s, drifters deliberately broke off from societal norms as well as from institutionalised forms of tourism<sup>10</sup> and travelled along the Hippie trail to Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal. These dropouts from affluent societies rambled without exception overland, relying on other travellers' information. Accordingly, travelling conditions were adventurous and the time needed very long, and in most cases even of unlimited duration. In the second half of the 1970s, though, the overland trip to Asia became more and more dangerous due to the Cold War's trouble spots, resulting in the decline, and even disappearance, of the drifter, marginalised from society (O'Reilly 2006: 1005). A new upsurge of alternative travelling unfolded in the 1980s owing to affordable air-tickets and a surge of guidebooks, initially with the main destination of South-East Asia, and then later along the backpackers' trails worldwide. Although it is difficult to map this development with quantitative data, it can be estimated that the backpacker phenomenon has been steadily growing since the 1980s (O'Reilly 2006: 1006). Not only have the above mentioned media triggered this boom, but also the emergence of a specialised travel industry can be seen as a major contributory cause. With the formation of budget flight travel agents, travel and outdoor equipment shops and accurately detailed guidebooks, as well as backpacker aimed infrastructures in the countries of destination, backpacking became possible for everybody, and moreover it became accepted and even encouraged by society, as we will see later.

Not only have the Camino Francés and various backpackers' routes undergone a real boom among young people from the post-industrialized nations during almost the same period of time, there are also some parallels in relation to their structures. In order to analyse these parallels I shall briefly refer to the theories of Victor Turner.

10 Cohen distinguished between institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of tourism (1972: 167–8).

### *Rites de passage and communitas*

Victor Turner (1973, 1974, 1978) provided a model of the structure of pilgrimages, referring to Arnold van Gennep's 1908 denominated *rites de passage*. The latter are transition rituals accompanying individual alterations with regard to a person's state, social status or particular points in the life cycle and consist of three phases. First, the separation: individuals leave their previous state. Second, transition or liminal phase: the daily social routines and hierarchies are abolished and the individuals are prepared for their new status. Third, reaggregation: through a ritual transformation the individuals acquire a new social status. Turner transferred this threefold model to the structure of pilgrimages and stated that a pilgrimage gave a person the opportunity to escape from the familiar surroundings of society and that pilgrims were released from the daily social routines all through the liminal phase *en route*. According to Turner, during this extraordinary and temporary period, labelled *liminality*, pilgrims are detached from hierarchical structures and all members of this pilgrimage community are socially equal. He called it *communitas*, representing an anti-structure to everyday life.<sup>11</sup>

There are noted weaknesses in Turner's model, notably that Turner's *communitas* thesis is based on a generalisation of a few examples from Christian pilgrimages, and the egalitarian status between pilgrims has been clearly disproved by more recent case studies.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, two points in connection with Turner's *communitas* theory remain valid for the purpose of my present research. First, for both foot-pilgrims and backpackers it is exceptionally easy to meet, re-meet and spend several days or weeks on the road with fellow travellers. And secondly, during the experience of this liminal and unconventional time of the journey a particular identity among like-minded people can develop, overlapping social strata and nationalities. Thereby hierarchical distinctions may occur, but they manifest themselves on a different level to everyday life.<sup>13</sup> According to my own empirical findings along the *Shikoku* pilgrimage, the Camino Francés and various backpackers' routes, one of the core factors making this kind of journeying so exceptional are the mutual feelings of solidarity, togetherness, security as well as the community spirit, expressed by many participants as the 'pilgrimage' or 'backpacker family', re-

11 Turner later distinguishes between *spontaneous* or *existential, normative* and *ideological communitas* (Turner & Turner 1978: 252). For the current discussion the former is relevant.

12 See, for example, Eade & Sallnow 1991: 4–5; Morinis 1992: 8.

13 I will describe these distinctions in the section 'Practices *en route*'.



'On the Camino I found the love of my life, Brigitte. I love you Brigitte. Signed: Jean-Lui on the way back, 16.09.09.' It's comparatively easy to meet people in the liminal state of travelling. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

spectively. Understanding *communitas* in this sense, rather than as a universal category, I think that Turner's concept remains extremely valuable.

In the succeeding discussion I also consider Turner's postulated structure of pilgrimages to be relevant—the separation from daily routine, the temporary as well as geographically different reality and the return to daily life—which can also be applied to backpacking. Hence, some scholars compare backpackers' journeys with contemporary forms of *rites de passage*, stating that long-term travellers go through an inner transformation and experience a new identity or find a new direction in life in going through this threefold structure.<sup>14</sup> As we will see later, foot-pilgrimages and backpacker's travels can indeed be seen as *rites de passage*, however, I think that the structure of a journey and *ergo* the involved transformation process starts before and ends after Turner's threefold structure. I therefore propose to examine all types of travelling and especially foot-pilgrimages and backpacking travels with a tenfold model, expanding Turner's model by paying attention to each of the relevant steps of a journey: beginning with the decision-making process and the preparation to go on a longer voyage, followed by the departure from home and the succeeding transition, then the journey itself including the ar-

14 See for example Adler 1985: 351; Graburn 1989: 21 ff.; Osterrieth 1997: 25 ff.; Cohen 2003: 102 and O'Reilly 2006: 998.

**Model of a journey's structure.**

	<b>Proposition</b>	<b>Turner</b>
1	Decision-making	–
2	Preparation	–
3	Departure	Separation
4	Transition	Separation
5	Journey	Liminality
6	Arrival	Liminality
7	Return	Reaggregation
8	Reintegration	Reaggregation
9	Working up the experiences	–
10	Lasting effects	–

rival at a physical spot, furthermore the return and the reintegration into the ordinary life and last but not least the working up of the entire experiences made plus the lasting effects.

Thus to travel involves more time than simply the duration on the road and likewise the transformation process has neither a fixed starting nor an ending point as in traditional *rites de passage*. Besides, the transformation process comes about on a self-imposed and individual rather than at a social level.

Having worked out a structural frame for both foot pilgrimages and backpackers' travels, the following section will focus on similarities within this proposed structure regarding the protagonists, the preconditions, the motives, the practices *en route* and the aftermath.

## Similarities

### *Protagonists*

Comparing the foot-pilgrims along the Camino Francés and backpackers generally from a demographic point of view, noticeable parallels can be identified among the participants. Although it is very difficult to find valid data regarding both types of travelling, the following estimates can be made.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the Camino, I mentioned already in footnote 8 that the evaluations of the pilgrims' office in Santiago de Compostela do not distinguish between the particular



The mean age of the foot-pilgrims is 30 years with a gender distribution of a 60/40 male preponderance ratio. The majority of foot-pilgrims come from the middle or upper-middle class, from urban areas, and with a high educational level (Frey 2002: 44). Whereas most foot-pilgrims originate from European countries, there is also quite a large number from North and South America and to a lesser extent from Australia, South Korea and Japan. Likewise, backpacking travellers are predominantly from post-industrial countries, especially of Western origin. Most come from Northern Europe, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, followed by the USA, Israel, Japan and South Korea (O'Reilly 2006: 1001; Sørensen 2003: 852). The vast majority are between 20 and 33 years of age, with a similar 60/40 male preponderance ratio, and like the foot-pilgrims, most come from an urban, well-educated middle- or upper-middle class background (Spreitzhofer 1998: 982; Sørensen 2003: 852). Furthermore, there are noticeably few black/ethnic minorities among both forms of traveller.

It is noteworthy that both foot-pilgrims and backpackers often set out on the journey at a time of transition in life. Life's junctures, such as gap years between school and career entry, changes of job, unemployment, but also divorce or loss of a loved one lead frequently to a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty about a person's own future (Riley 1988: 317). A longer journey offers the possibility for an individual to confront this momentary life-crisis away from daily surroundings and affords the chance to think about consequential decisions. While I met many foot-pilgrims, both in Spain and in

sub-groups of the participants and therefore the official numbers do not correspond with my definition of foot-pilgrims mentioned above. The official numbers for the year 2008 in regard to age are: 52,619 (<35 years of age), 65,364 (36–60 years of age) and 7,158 (60+ years of age) (<http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statiko2.htm>); as to gender: 72,936 (male) and 52,205 (female) (<http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statiko3.htm>) and as to nationalities: 61,112 (Spain), 15,746 (Germany) and 10,707 (Italy) among others (<http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statiko6.htm>) (all accessed on 30 November 2009). I argue that the high number in the age-group of 36–60 year-olds does not represent the long-distance walkers, who do the route in one go, and that therefore younger people are underestimated in the category of what I term foot-pilgrims in this article. Furthermore, many Spanish people do the pilgrimage in stages and quite a lot of Italians go in organised groups: for this reason the numbers cannot be accurate for this study. The estimations above are based on my own observations and correspond to a great degree with Frey's finding (2002: 44). With regard to backpackers, quantitative data exist only in certain regional case studies, but not on a worldwide basis. For Australia see, for example, Loker-Murphy & Pearce 1995 and for a comparison between Israeli backpackers travelling to Latin America and Southeast Asia, see Reichel *et al.* 2009.

Japan, in such a situation of transition, I also came across a few opposite cases, namely that the wish to do the pilgrimage had been prevailing for many years and the informants were either waiting for a convenient gap in life or they quit their job in order to undertake this long desired journey. Anders Sørensen (2003: 853) mentions similar cases with regard to backpackers.

A further correspondence between foot-pilgrims and backpackers is the deliberate and clearly enunciated dissociation from motorised or organised pilgrimage respectively, or from package tourism (Haab 1998: 127; Spreitzhofer 1998: 980). As already mentioned above, the protagonists refer to 'authentic' styles of travelling holding up as role-models the medieval pilgrim or the early discoverer as well as the drifter of the 1960s. Many argue that the real pilgrimage or backpacker experience can only be sensed through long duration and through one's own efforts spent *en route* such that a possible transformation may only happen this way. Such dissociation is also manifested through the appearance of such travellers. Both foot-pilgrims and backpackers are, in most cases, easily recognisable by their clothing and equipment. It is not only through the worn-out shoes, clothes and backpacks, which clearly indicate the time spent on the road, but also quite a few travel with special paraphernalia, such as mended clothes as well as equipment, and some of the well-worn look may even be artificially created (Sørensen 2003: 856). The unitary look not only serves to distance pilgrims and backpackers from the institutionalised forms of travelling; it also helps to create and



Different nationalities, one common aim: the commitment-free feeling of being on the road. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

maintain an identity among like-minded foot-pilgrims or backpackers, like the shell does for Santiago pilgrims.

### ***Preconditions***

To travel for its own sake was only possible for a well-off minority in former eras and still today, only people from affluent societies can afford this luxurious time-out, hence a small part of the world's population only. Thus, one of the most important preconditions to undertake a pilgrimage or a backpackers' trip is financial affordability. As mentioned before, in most cases the largest part of a backpackers' total budget is spent on the airfares, since most typical backpackers' destinations are countries with a low cost of living. Due to the relatively low priced airfare offers of the last few years, even students and people with a modest income from post-industrial nations can afford to undertake a longer voyage. This is also true for the foot-pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: the journey to the starting point and the return journey occasions the greatest part of the total expenses, provided one stays in the inexpensive pilgrim's hostels and does not spend too much money on food and drink.

Another important factor regarding the preconditions for pilgrimages and backpackers' journeys are the political circumstances. Whereas in mediaeval times the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela was connected with dangers and political obstacles, today it is easy for everybody to perform the journey. The same applies to backpacking worldwide: with only a few exceptions like Saudi Arabia, Bhutan and North Korea, all political borders are open for individual travellers and most countries are comparatively easy to visit.

Also socio-economic changes in post-industrial societies in the last three decades are of importance. Unlike in the past, a lifelong engagement with the same company is neither given, nor is it desired by most employers. In addition, nowadays career entry can be postponed without any substantial consequences and it is often possible without further ado to pause one's assigned job and career in order to take some time out.

In this context it should also be mentioned that to travel for its own sake is nowadays generally accepted and legitimised by Western societies. Whereas in former times only pilgrimages and itineraries of merchants and craftsmen were socially approved forms of travel for the commonalty, nowadays a lengthy time-out, in whatever form, neither has to be justified nor it is regarded as something unusual or extrinsic. Considering the social stigmatisation of the tramps in the 1930s and the hippies in the 1960s as fringe groups, travelling is not only legitimised today, it is even encouraged and travellers

generally win a wide acceptance (Binder 2005: 10–11; O'Reilly 2006: 998). Regarding the Camino, a similar observation can be made: according to a local hostel owner, in his village foot-pilgrims were regarded with suspicion and often associated with the homeless and beggars until the 1980s. This picture has completely changed in the last few years. Michael Rotpart (1995: 122) claims that having journeyed enhanced not only status and prestige, but also one's identity and Camille Caprioglio O'Reilly (2006: 1010) suggests that well-travelled people even had a greater chance to find a job due to their empirical knowledge. Although this latter point can not be pursued within this paper, I think it is important to note that a pilgrimage or a backpacking journey is in today's Western society widely accepted and encouraged, whereas people spending their holidays at home 'doing nothing' are regarded rather sceptically (Graburn 1989: 23).

Connected to the preconditions of pilgrimages and backpacking is also the decreased anxiety about the unknown and the unpredictability which usually comes along with each journey. The previously mentioned improvements of transportation and infrastructure along the Camino and along backpacker's routes contribute to this, as well as the prevalence of travelling information worldwide through different media. The wide choice of pilgrimage- and backpackers' guidebooks gives the unknown a name and helps to prepare and plan the journey.<sup>16</sup> Also the recent growth of telecommunications is of importance: there is hardly a foot-pilgrim or a backpacker without a mobile phone on the road and some are even carrying laptop computers along in order to maintain their regular travelling blogs. Further, there are internet access points in almost all the hostels along the Camino and a wide range of internet cafés are prevalent at backpacking places. In addition to improved telecommunication possibilities, the astonishingly comprehensive information available in guidebooks ensure safety as well as comfort and better enable inexperienced and reluctant travellers to undertake the journey. Thus the pilgrimage guidebooks through Spain are furnished with various items of advice and detailed maps listing all the possibilities for food and shelter. The same can be said of backpackers' guidebooks, which additionally provide advice for transportation. Hence it does not occasion surprise that the long-selling *South America Handbook* is called 'the Bible' and *Lonely Planet's South-East Asia on a Shoestring* 'the Yellow Bible'. In brief, it has become very easy

16 Travelling guidebooks have developed as a literary genre of their own, to such an extent that they are even parodied by travel authors writing about non-existing countries. See, for example, <http://www.jetlag-travel.de/> (accessed on 30 November 2009).

to travel on one's own in most parts of the world. In the case of the Camino it must also be said that the mostly flat route is fairly easy to walk and very well marked with yellow arrows, in a way that it is almost impossible to get lost and therefore daily planning is not necessary.

Travel information and documentation not only minimize the anxiety about the unknown, they also function as triggers to undertake a journey and at the same time they fire the imagination and expectation of the participants.

### ***Motives***

As neither foot-pilgrims nor backpackers form a homogeneous group, their reasons and motives to undertake a journey are equally multi-layered as well as 'multifunctional' (Rinschede 1992: 52) and correlate with the socio-cultural and economic changes of their societies. Therefore usually a wide range of push and pull factors are of relevance for the individual in deciding whether to go on a journey, rather than a single motive. The motives range from a love for adventure or sports activities, meeting other people, the desire for freedom, independence and fun, to historic and cultural interests and the quest for self-development, as well as spiritual needs (Frey 2002: 13; Riley 1988: 318). However, not only are the motives interwoven and likely to change along the journey, they are also often elusive for the protagonists themselves, besides being influenced by former travelling stories. During my research in Spain and Japan, I not infrequently came across statements such as 'the need for some time-out', 'for self-discovery', 'I was called by the road' or 'my motives are rather spiritual than religious', thus stereotypical expressions that must have been picked up deliberately or unknowingly by other travelers or accounts in media and advertising. Consequently, it is very hard to get valid data regarding the motives of foot-pilgrims and backpackers, not least because it usually takes a few days to inspire the confidence of the informants in order to learn the real reasons. What follows are therefore conceptions of casual relations and tendencies.

In the preceding section the socio-economic changes that have occurred post-industrial societies over the last thirty years was mentioned, which has led to different working and living philosophies. The less rigid working structures permit, on the one hand, individual freedom and nearly unlimited personal development possibilities, but on the other hand they also imply insecurities regarding personal responsibility, place of employment and future orientation. Whereas these insecurities were absorbed by family and working structures, as well as religious institutions in former times, young

people today are confronted with a fast growing, economically focused world, and so are more and more self-orientated, resulting in a sense of unease. A longer time-out in the form of a pilgrimage or a backpacking journey therefore forms an ideal way to evade the daily routine and the pressure of society and enables an individual quest for alternative forms of living. Regarding the motives of backpackers, Pamela J. Riley (1988: 317) points out that many desire to escape from the daily routine and from making decisions regarding the future. By travelling they can postpone responsibilities and commitments such as family, children and careers. Escape from, and postponement of, responsibilities due to insecurity were also an often stated incitement among the foot-pilgrims in Spain as well as in Japan. Quite a number hoped that a long respite in an unfamiliar environment and the social exchange with other people might result in new ideas and insights concerning their path in life.

Reasons for a longer time-out are also connected with personal crisis and the hope for self betterment. It was already mentioned above that crises often occur in a time of transition due to various circumstances. Pilgrimages as well as backpacking travels can therefore provide a form of therapeutic act for certain people (Morinis 1992: 9; Frey 2002: 296) in order to cure personal and social, physical and psychological as well as spiritual deficiencies (Dubisch & Winkelmann 2005: X). An evident example of a personal crisis with hope for betterment is the loss of, or resignation from a job; this is especially the case for walkers along the Camino and the Shikoku Henro, but it also seems to be a motive for backpackers. Adler for example suggests that 'many young people clearly seek compensation for missing occupational satisfaction in the achievements of travel "careers"' (1985: 352).

Another point in this context is the frequently expressed criticism by foot-pilgrims and backpackers of modern Western society (Spreitzhofer 1998: 982; Rotpart 2006: 14), which is based upon consumption, materialism and economic efficiency with a shortcoming in spiritual needs (Reader 2007: 222). Attracted by myths, miraculous stories and information inspired by so called *New Age* ideas, pilgrimages and backpacking destinations raise hopes and fantasies of an exotic and spiritual other, not relating to one's own cultural and religious direction. Although the Camino Francés is clearly embedded in a Christian and occidental tradition, the possibility of walking evidently permits a person to live a personal spiritual alternative on a daily basis, away from the organised and established religious institutions. This is also true for backpackers, who often develop an interest in other religious or spiritual traditions and combine their travels with a sojourn in an Indian ashram or in a temple in Thailand (Riley 1988: 319; Reichel *et al.* 2009: 224). When I visited

the pyramids in Gizeh for the first time as a backpacker, a local watchman approached and offered to allow me to spend the night inside the Sphinx to meditate—for a small gratuity of course. The example shows that desires like this apparently exist among travellers, especially when the aspired spirituality can be combined with an unusual setting or an adventure.

In the course of this discussion it has to be clearly stated that primarily religious motives are hardly ever found, either among Santiago foot-pilgrims or backpackers.<sup>17</sup> Although foot-pilgrims are generally still associated with devotional people doing the Camino out of purely religious or spiritual motives and even though this image is gratefully enhanced by the church authorities through their own statistics,<sup>18</sup> Barbara Haab (1998: 54) as well as Nancy Louise Frey (2002: 46) and Patrick Windisch (2008: 103) argue that only a minority of the long-term walkers undertake the pilgrimage out of religious motives. My own recent findings support this conclusion in all respects, and correspond with my previous study of the pilgrimage in Shikoku.

A further motive often mentioned by many foot-pilgrims, backpackers and scholars alike is the desire for self-discovery and personal development. Although these terms seem to be a little stale and, as mentioned above, influenced by earlier narratives, they can be more helpfully seen in terms of education and personal challenge. Whereas many take to the road in order to study more about other cultures and people, at the same time they also learn lots about themselves, such as openness, communication, self-reliance and their physical and mental limits, as well as their own culture. According to Jana Binder (2005: 122 ff.) backpacking is even a part of the education system and a supplement to career entry; she calls it 'an economic capital', and refers to its assessments by both potential employers and backpackers. Although

17 Religious is understood here as a personal affiliation to a religious tradition or institution.

18 The pilgrim's office in Santiago de Compostela asks the pilgrims to fill in a form regarding the motives of the journey before handing out the pilgrimage certification. In the year 2008 one could tick either 'religious', 'religious-cultural' or 'cultural' motives. The result for the year 2008 is: 50,732 religious, 63,598 religious-cultural and 10,811 cultural (<http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statiko5.htm>, accessed 30 on November 2009). The overwhelming numbers of religiously motivated numbers must not only be rigorously questioned in view of the survey method, but also with regard to the implications mentioned in the footnotes 8 and 15. In the year 2009 one could choose between 'religious', 'religious or other' or 'non religious' motives. I could observe that the pilgrims ticking 'non religious' motives were asked whether they were not interested in spirituality and when affirming it was displayed as a religious motive.

this view might depend on particular cultural and societal considerations,<sup>19</sup> the motive to undertake a backpacking journey or a foot-pilgrimage is often curiosity and the desire to learn more. Concerning the Camino for instance, I talked to a few foot-pilgrims who saw their journey as a personal challenge, hoping to get enough self-esteem in order to be able to do a future trip in other, more exotic parts of the world.

Evidently the motives correlate with the decision making process to do a journey and to a lesser extent also concerning its preparation. Although the motivation can change along the way, with the departure the practices *en route* are about to start, including all the above mentioned steps in the tenfold model until the return.

### ***Practices en route***

The foot-pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and backpackers' travels can also be compared with regard to the pre-defined routing. Although travellers often claim to look for individual or alternative roads, in most cases the plainly described ways of the common guidebooks are chosen. This stands in contrast to most pilgrims who declare that wandering by themselves is one of the crucial points of the Camino and it also diverges from a central issue of backpacking, to travel 'off the beaten track' with a spontaneous itinerary every day (see Binder 2005: 92). With regard to the Santiago pilgrims, there are actually manifold walking possibilities, on the one hand along various routes throughout Europe, and on the other hand along different established hiking paths in Spain and Portugal, which all end up at the famous cathedral in Santiago de Compostela.<sup>20</sup> As a matter of fact, however, the bulk of travellers follow the Camino Francés. By analogy fixed backpacker routes have been established over the years, with the protagonists 'following similar itineraries, staying in the same currently popular enclaves, and participating in similar sightseeing, vacationing and partying activities. . .' (Cohen 2003: 102). This can be explained through the activities of the media and touristic advertising strategies, as described earlier, as well as through the word-of-mouth propaganda among the travellers themselves.

Over the years hostels and guest houses sprang up along the pre-defined routes, which developed to form pilgrims' or backpackers' centres, respec-

19 Binder also states that most positive statements regarding travelling as a form of education originate from English-speaking travellers and employers (2005: 125).

20 Besides the prominent Camino Francés there are the Via de la Plata, the Camino de la Costa, the Camino Primitivo, the Camino Portugués, the Via Lusitania and the Camino de Santiago Mozárabe.





Cold beer, a pool in the garden, free internet and a kitchen surrounded by Bob Marley tunes. Cheap and convenient accommodation is necessary for both foot pilgrims and backpackers. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

tively. These single places are quite simply furnished and low priced, often offering a communal kitchen, lounge and dormitory. It is here, where the travellers meet people of their own kind, that exchanges happen and relations get established. Not only do backpackers frequently schedule their itinerary according to the location of these centres, but also foot-pilgrims deliberately plan to stay at certain hostels with particular reputations along the way.

The rather collective road practice is not only evident regarding the pre-defined routing and the visited meeting places, but also concerning common perceptions and experiences of the travellers along the route. Photos and descriptions in guidebooks and by fellow travellers trigger to shoot the same pictures and experience equivalent sensations and happenings as outlined. For example lines like ‘Meseta pure! The following stretch is one of the hardest and for many the spiritually most thrilling along the way’<sup>21</sup> lead to a broadly perceived spiritual experience at this particular stretch, as it was communicated to me by various foot-pilgrims during my research.

Although many foot-pilgrims and backpackers set out on their journey on their own—considering being on one’s own a unique experience and a chance to reflect about oneself—a central facet of being on the road is the meeting and the contact with fellow travellers from various nations. ‘Travelling with

21 Translated quote from Joos & Kasper 2009: 147.

others offers the advantage of “security and protection”. Most [backpackers] said they occasionally felt physical and emotional loneliness, but overall expressed the belief that travelling alone is preferable because one has more interactions with other travellers. . .’ (Riley 1988: 324.) Even though most foot-pilgrims and backpackers travel only for a certain time together, the exchange can generate valuable insights about oneself and one’s culture as well as long lasting friendships, or love may develop (see Frey 2002: 135). As mentioned above, it is astonishingly easy to meet people along the way because of the liminal situation abroad, which provides a necessity to be and talk with someone in a language one commands. Hence there is a need to socialize in whatever form and therefore it is comprehensible that travellers prefer to mingle with one another rather than with locals. On the other hand the pre-defined routing provides the possibility to meet the same people over and over again, sometimes at a stage, that one knows the new acquaintance already before the actual encounter with the person, due to the stories and rumours along the road. Like a sworn circle, solidarity, togetherness, friendship and a feeling of belonging to a wider community from different nationalities may evolve, in which the usual categorisations such as nationality, sex, age, social strata and marital status are not relevant. Within this *communitas* the same major aims and daily issues are pursued and through mutual understanding and a sense of security, a new identity can come into being, either as a pilgrim or a backpacker. This identity is often affirmed by the acknowledgement of short-term pilgrims or package tourists met on the road who express their admiration for long-term travelling. ‘It has something magic about it. Those who experience



A family-like community: travelling, cooking, eating and living together away from the daily routine. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

*communitas* have a feeling of endless power.’ (Turner & Turner 1978: 14.) This powerful experience is enhanced through the ongoing living of a commitment-free life with no professional or daily social obligations. Although travelling partners can, theoretically, be chosen every day anew, there are hardly any commitments or responsibilities involved due to the temporary limited time to be spent together. This liminal freedom intensifies the emotions on a daily basis, leading to a common ‘pilgrimage or backpacker family’ feeling. The term ‘family’ was not only used by pilgrims both in Spain and in Shikoku during my own researches, it is also applied in backpackers’ narratives, as in Binder’s findings (2005: 208).

However, as mentioned earlier, contrary to Turner’s theory I recognise that hierarchical structures within this family or *communitas* exist, which are manifest in the foot-pilgrims’ or backpackers’ ‘road status’ (Sørensen 2003: 856). Road status is multifaceted, consisting of the number of journeys already undertaken, the duration of the trip, the distance of the route, the speed at which the distance is covered, the hardship and the difficulty of the routing and the optimizing of a minimal budget.<sup>22</sup> Nelson H. Graburn (1989: 34) labels these ‘measurements of the hierarchies of prestige’. Status and prestige can also be associated with levels of authenticity, which correlate to the duration and distance of the trip. As stated above, authenticity is based on the role models of the pilgrims of the Middle Ages as well as the early explorers and the drifters, but also with the assumption that longer journeys have the potential to induce an existential change (Frey 2002: 174).

Another common attribute between foot-pilgrims and backpackers is to travel on a low budget, which forms part of the road status. Riley states that ‘status among travellers is closely tied to living cheaply and obtaining the best “bargains” which serve as indicators that one is an experienced traveller’ (1988: 320). However, to journey on a low budget is only possible through the support and the privileged treatment of the local people and authorities. Along the Camino various public and private hostels have sprung up in the last few years, allowing the pilgrim to stay for a small donation or a few Euros. These hostels are run by volunteers supporting the pilgrims and giving them a feeling of doing something and being somebody special. Also backpackers’ accommodations and means of transport are comparatively inexpensive, and

22 An apparent example of hierarchy among pilgrims can be found in Shikoku. Pilgrims carry different colours of *Osamefuda*, name cards to be furnished with wishes and to be placed at temples along the pilgrimage. They are also handed over to locals in order to thank them for support and they are considered as talismans. The colour of the *Osamefuda* correlates to the number of performed pilgrimages.



A common way to carry on one's trip is to open up a pilgrim's or backpacker's hostel. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

in addition backpackers are often provided with support by the locals due to their 'exotic bonus'. This is particularly true in traditional nomadic societies with their long lasting cultivated hospitality. The earned generosity of previously unknown people makes another incisive and poignant experience of a journey and contributes to the pilgrim or backpacker identity.

The reverse of the coin is a potential exploitation of the local people's benevolence and friendliness. Backpackers from a middle class background often 'play with their identities' (Riley 1988: 321), simulating being budget travellers in order to save on their travelling expenses, as well as to enhance their road status. Analogue Frey mentions the partially critical positions of Spanish villagers describing the foot-pilgrimage as *mucho morro*, as fatly impertinent, and as an inexpensive way to go on vacation (2002: 192). I heard similar statements along the Camino, especially regarding apparently well-off walkers playing with identity in imitation of the medieval, poor pilgrims.

The unsolicited asceticism through application of a limited budget, as well as through the physical and mental endeavours, which come along with foot-pilgrimages and backpackers' trips alike, are *ergo* differently understood and interpreted. Nevertheless, I have not met any foot-pilgrim connecting the Camino's strenuousness with the suffering and penitence according to a traditional Christian understanding during my own research. Rather, I would stress that the consequence of an arduous journey are personal satisfaction and self-affirmation, or, as Graburn states, a 'self-imposed rite of passage to



Handicraft and souvenir shops along the pilgrimage route. A similar sight can be found along backpacker's destinations. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

prove to themselves and to their peers that they can make their own way in life' (1989: 35). This self-affirmation results for both foot-pilgrims and backpackers alike through an achieved material reduction to a minimum, with all personal possessions and necessities fitting into one's backpack. In this context, letting go of unimportant material items helps to discover and appreciate small but essential matters and values, which have been lost in the post-industrialised affluent societies (Haab 1998: 133) and provides the base for a transformation regarding one's identity or view of the world.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike the drifters, contemporary backpackers usually leave home with a fixed return date and the intention to go back to normal life after the journey (Sørensen 2003: 852), akin to the foot-pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela, where the destination is clearly defined. However, for a certain number, the pilgrimage, or backpacker, experience is so striking that they do not stop at a single trip but rather look for a way to continue the journey, either by keeping on travelling or by returning for a new trip after a short while. The Spanish expression *estar enganchado*, meaning being wound up or addicted to, is used for pilgrims who keep coming back to the Camino either as walkers or volunteers running the hostels (Frey 2002: 282). Regarding backpacking Riley talks about the 'addictive experience' of travelling and mentions examples of backpackers being on the road for years, in two cases even for 18 and 32 years

23 Regarding the transformation and the aftermath see the next section.

(1988: 320). Another way to extend the travelling experience and to escape from the ordinary life back home is to open up a hostel or a restaurant along the Camino or a backpackers' route or to sell some handicraft and clothing, as can be often encountered along the path in Spain as well as at several backpacker's destinations.

Nonetheless, most foot-pilgrims and backpackers return home after the liminal phase of the journey and go back into daily life again. This entire process is similar to the first two steps in the above-mentioned model, largely neglected by scholars in regard to both pilgrimages and backpacking, although it forms part of the journey and is therefore equally essential. Arriving in Santiago de Compostela, or at the ultimate destination of the backpackers' trip and realising that the journey was about to end, I met a few protagonists expressing desires and plans to either redo their travels or to do something similar in another part of the world. This can be interpreted as a wish to prolong the liminal time and identity, but also as worries relating to a return to a former life. In fact, the return journey comes all too suddenly for many and hardly anybody is prepared for it or its aftermath. Whereas the travellers moved on for several weeks or even months either on foot or with simple means of transport, the return journey comes about very quickly, either by direct train or flight. In the course of this, the homecomers lack the time to work up their experiences and are insufficiently prepared to confront another reality within a few hours.

Considering the return as a part of the whole route, the reintegration including the working up of one's experiences and their lasting effects are, however, intertwining, elements of the aftermath.

### ***Aftermath***

The aftermath of the journey begins with the arrival at home and the reintegration process into daily life. Thereby, not infrequently, two different worlds collide and many feel alienated from their former familiar surroundings. This alienation can be explained through the experienced transformation due to the long time-out as well as the sudden absence of the pilgrim- or backpacker-family. Whilst homecomers often feel like communicating to family and friends in a similar way to their pilgrimage- and backpacking-peers, they soon realise that either the interest or the frame of reference regarding experiences, narrations and encounters is absent in their case. By the same token, the homecomer may appear to be a 'familiar stranger' for the people at home (Frey 2002: 301). Thus returning foot-pilgrims and backpackers are, in the first instance, confronted with two different value systems, a condition,

which might last for a while or even persist and become part of one's new identity. 'A significant number may adopt a "post-modern", hybrid identity, embracing concomitantly two centres or cultural worlds – that of their own Western society and that of the country of their choice. . .' (Cohen 2003: 104). Further, as mentioned above, the achievement of the accomplished travel and the affiliation to an expanded *communitas* often generate a sentiment of satisfaction and self-affirmation. Both foot-pilgrims and backpackers frequently report an increase in self-confidence after the journey such that they wanted to continue their life more independently (see Frey 2002: 301; Riley 1988: 325; Spreitzhofer 1998: 982). In this connection O'Reilly (2006: 1012–13) mentions the accumulated 'social, cultural and symbolic capital', enhancing prestige and reputation in different contexts, such as in employment or in social circles. Therefore due to the journey's achieved new points of view, the feeling of alienation of former close people, a greater self-confidence and the enhanced social prestige can lead to a complete reorganisation of the antecedent life, regarding familial, social and occupational relations. In this sense the return and the reintegration may be seen as a renaissance after the anti-structural phase of the journey, however, considering the journey as a *rite de passage* must include the working up of the experiences and the lasting effects, as suggested in the expanded model above.

Foot-pilgrims and backpackers may become aware of the achieved transformations immediately after the return, but in many cases the changes become manifest only after a certain duration, when the experiences concretise and meaning can be allocated (Frey 2002: 253). For instance one of my core informants in Shikoku stated one day after finishing his foot-pilgrimage that nothing had changed, although he desired a transformation. In an interview seven months later, however, he acknowledged that his life had changed in various contexts and that the transformation happened through the findings and insights he gained with his travels. Thus the working up of the experiences might take a few months for both foot-pilgrims and backpackers, whereby the photos, diaries and souvenirs brought back help to reconstruct their journey, experiences and insights. Whether the effects of the journey are long-lasting cannot be discussed in this article, since there exist no empirical studies in this regard. Nevertheless, I consider the lasting effects a considerable element in studying pilgrimages and backpacker's journeys, which should be afforded close attention in future research work. The lasting effects not only form the final component of the proposed tenfold travel structure, they are also relevant regarding the similarities between foot-pilgrims and backpackers.

## Conclusion

The goal of this article was to outline and discuss the similarities between contemporary 'foot-pilgrims' to Santiago de Compostela and travellers more generally termed 'backpackers'. It was noted that due to their dynamic characteristics neither foot-pilgrims nor backpackers can be considered a homogeneous group and that the motives to undertake the journey are for each protagonist multi-layered and multifunctional. However, as I tried to show, both ways of travelling have re-emerged simultaneously in the 1980s and developed into an evident boom by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Thereby not only the protagonists and their demographic backgrounds evince parallels, but also the travellers' preconditions, which in turn influence the motives as well as the practices on the road. Following the proposed ten-fold model as a journey's structure, I demonstrated the similarities between foot-pilgrims and backpackers, from their motives to the practices *en route* and to the aftermath. Within this long lasting travelling process the exterior journey always correlates with the inner journey. At the same time, a personal transformation of the protagonists is very possible to occur, be it an increase in self-confidence or an enhancement in status, prestige and identity, alongside further personal insights. Whilst travelling can therefore be seen as a form of a transition, in contrast to traditional *rites de passage* there is neither a fixed starting point nor a determined ending point, moreover the transformation is self-imposed and occurs on an individual than on a social level. In this context a foot-pilgrimage and a backpacker's trip can be understood as an ideal way to evade the daily routine and the societal pressure in order to look for a different kind of living. But it may also be a personal quest for a change or an improvement of one's situation as well as an alternative to the established social and religious institutions. In whichever context a foot-pilgrimage or a backpacker's travel is undertaken, I suggest that there are two core factors held responsible for the extraordinary time experienced on the road, which both serve as a trigger to leave one's ordinary life as well as to enable a personal transformation. Both factors are correlated with the collective road practice, on the one hand it is the liminal and commitment-free feeling of being on the road and on the other hand the easily achieved encounter with fellow-travellers from all over the world and the sentiment to belong to an extended pilgrim or backpacker community. Within this family-like community however, the travelling partners can be chosen on a daily base with no further responsibilities involved. In this sense Turner's concept of *liminality* understood as a period free of daily commitments, which allows one to be



part of a *communitas* comprehended as a family with very well established hierarchical road statuses, can be applied to both, foot-pilgrims and backpackers. As a result the foot-pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela should not be considered as a purely religious journey nor a backpacker's travel simply as a pleasure-seeking trip, but rather as an opportunity for a transformation towards new perspectives. Or as the renowned Swiss travel writer Nicolas Bouvier formulated: 'The magical power of a journey lies in the purification of one's life before it gets established and decorated.'<sup>24</sup>

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24 Quote translated from Bouvier 2004: 26.

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## Theology of *Karman*

### Merit, death and release in the case of Varanasi, India

#### The motives of pilgrims

Pilgrimage has, of course, many aspects worth studying. To mention a few; one may focus on the ritual aspect and study pilgrimage as a ritual process, focussing on the various rituals being performed by the pilgrims on the way to their goal, or, once they have reached their goal, either by the pilgrims or by ritual specialists. One may also focus on the experiential or psychological, or on the social aspects of pilgrimage. Or, one may focus on a combination of all of these aspects, as, for example, is the case with the studies of Victor Turner (Turner 1973, 1974; Turner & Turner 1978).

In this article, I shall focus on the question as to what motives the pilgrims may have for performing pilgrimage, and, in doing this, I shall be dealing especially with the Hindu tradition, namely with pilgrimage to Varanasi, Banaras or Kāśī, which is often considered the Hindu sacred city par excellence by both Hindus and Westerners alike.

Today, Varanasi is a medium sized Indian town at the confluences of the Gaṅgā, Varuṇa and Asi rivers, situated 82° 56'E – 83° 03'E and 25° 14'N – 25° 23.5'N in the South Eastern corner of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state of India. According to the 2001 census, the town itself has a little more than 1.1 million inhabitants and covers approximately 112 square kilometers and is the centre of the Varanasi district with more than 3.1 million inhabitants (Census 2001).

It is not uncommon to hear the claim that Varanasi is one of the oldest towns in the world with an unbroken Hindu history. However, this is not altogether correct. To judge from the so-called Raj Ghat excavations, archaeological evidence of the earliest settlement at Varanasi cannot be pushed back further than the eighth century BCE. Furthermore, we cannot talk of a truly urban settlement until some centuries later. Thanks to its situation at a confluence of one of the largest North Indian rivers, it seems to have developed into a thriving commercial city which, according to Buddhist sources, attracted

the Buddha and his followers to the nearby deer park and village of Sarnath. However, there is no evidence of Brahmanic or Hindu religion in Varanasi until the end of the third century CE, from which time the first emblems with Śaiva symbols have been found. As Hans T. Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson (2004: 20–1) have argued, the transformation of Varanasi from a commercial into a sacred town took place between the fourth and the early sixth centuries during the Gupta dynasty. This coincides with a general decay of towns in Western and Northern India which R. S. Sharma has attributed to the fall of the Ku ā a empire and the resulting decline in long-distance trade with Central Asia and the Roman Empire (Sharma 1987: 132–42).

The source of this analysis will be four chapters (KK IV.1.25–8) of the Sanskrit text called *Kāśīkha ā* which is attributed to the *Skanda Purā ā* and seems to reflect the conditions after the Muslim raids in 1194 CE. Thus, it was probably composed sometime during the thirteenth or fourteenth century CE (Eck 1983: 9). Of these four chapters the first deals in an overall way with *Kāśī* as such under the name *Avimukta*, the second deals more specifically with the area around the present *Ma īkar īkā Ghā ā*, and the last two deal more generally with the river *Ga āgā*. Most of the material in the analysis stems from the two first chapters.

Although this text is not modern, its traditions are still reflected in the present day Varanasi, and, although it is a Brahmanic text, it has possibly influenced many of the popular ideas about Varanasi which are found among Hindus all over India even today. The complete *Kāśīkha ā* is quite a voluminous work and may be considered an inflated glorification, *māhātmya* or *sthalapurā ā*, of *Kāśī*, as I shall call it from now on.<sup>1</sup> These glorifications are Brahmanic texts which intend to popularize sacred places, by telling their myths of origin and, not least, by describing the fruits which visits or pilgrimages to them give. I am here using the term ‘theology’, because the thought system found in the text is fashioned by Brahmins, or theologians, and not because the article deals with ‘theology’ proper. Although I have not myself investigated the motives of modern pilgrims to Varanasi, the overall remarks of the Indian anthropologist L. P. Vidyarthi that the ‘merits of pilgrimage range from immediate relief from mundane troubles to the expiation of the sins and gaining the ultimate reality’ does, however, suggest that the motives

1 I have relied mainly on the so-called Mora-edition (Vedavyasa 1961), but in the case of doubt I have also consulted the edition of Ācārya Śrī Karu āpati Tripā hī (Vyasa 1991 and 1992).

of modern pilgrims in general are similar to the motives which are described in much more detail in this text (Vidyarthi & Jha et al. 1979: 128).

### The sources of the power of Kāśī

The effects of pilgrimage are attributed to the special power of the sacred place. In the case of the Kāśīkhaṇḍa, the power of Kāśī, or, as it is also called in this text, Avimukta, is attributed to several factors.

The first and foremost of these factors seems to be the presence of the Hindu god Śiva who is said to be constantly abiding there. Thus one verse says:

Avimukta is said to be the highest secret among secrets here. There achievement is present. There the Lord constantly dwells.<sup>2</sup>  
(KK IV.1.25.57.)

In fact the meaning of the name Avimukta is what is 'not left', or 'unleft', and refers to the idea that Śiva has never left, and will never leave this place.<sup>3</sup>

The same idea is also expressed later in the text in the form of a cosmogonic myth which, combining features of Vedic and Sākhya cosmogony, explains how the god Śiva is identical with Brahman, Puruṣa, or the One Principle, which alone existed before creation. Śiva now created two objects or beings. Out of his own body he first created his female counterpart, Śivā, or the Goddess, who is identified with the Sākhya principle of matter, Prakṛti or Pradhāna, which is again identified with Māyā or the great illusion. Simultaneously, the text says, Kāśī was created from the soles of the feet of Śiva and the goddess, for the sake of their sport, and because they never leave that spot, it is called the 'unleft' or Avimukta (KK IV.1.26.8–28).

Thus, according to this myth, the special power of Kāśī should be attributed to two circumstances. Firstly, that this place is grounded in creation, with

2 gūhyānā parama guhyamavimuktam iheritam/tatrasa nihitāsiddhis tatra nitya sthito vibhu // . All translations in this article are my own, although I have consulted G. V. Tagare's translation (Tagare 1996).

3 Several passages in the text, however, also make a word play on the name to the effect that the person who does not leave the unleft place (yo 'vimukta na muñcati) reaches some superior state of existence; see e.g. KK IV.1.67 and 75, or KK IV.1.77 where the one who does not leave Avimukta is said to become mukta or released.

the corresponding associations of being the centre of the world. Secondly, the circumstance that it is the eternal sporting ground of Śiva and his consort.<sup>4</sup>

Connected with the concept of Kāśī being the centre of the world is also the idea that it is actually not situated in this world, but in the intermediate sphere between heaven and earth (antarikṣa) (KK IV.1.25.58).

A second component in the power of Kāśī is the importance of the cremation ghāṭī, Maikarīkā, which has its own mythical legitimization in the Kāśīkhaṇḍa (KK IV.1.26.36 ff.). As has been pointed out by Bakker and Isaacson (2004: 42, 46 ff.), this place is not included in the description of the sacred area in the earliest mähātmya of Varanasi, probably because it was considered too impure. It may, however, have been inhabited by Pāśupata ascetics who frequented cemeteries and used to smear their bodies with ashes, and, in later versions of the Kāśī mähātmya, this impure place was included in the sacred area and may have contributed to the popular idea that dying in Kāśī confers immediate salvation on man.

A third component is, of course, the river Gaṅgā, whose waters are considered able to purify all sins and defilements. That this component was also considered by the authors of the Kāśīkhaṇḍa is clear from the fact that two long chapters (KK.IV.1.27 and 28) praising the effects and sacredness of the river Gaṅgā have been added directly after the chapters that praise Avimukta and Maikarīkā.

## The fruits of pilgrimage

Having established what the sources of the powers of Kāśī are, let us now turn to investigate what the Kāśīkhaṇḍa tells about the fruits of visiting or staying in Kāśī.<sup>5</sup> A statement regarding the merit attributed to an observance or a ritual, in Sanskrit called phalaśruti, is a phenomenon which goes back to the Vedic tradition where various rituals were thought to confer different merits on the person making the sacrifice, or the yajamāna. In the later, and more popular Purāṇas such statements became much more frequent, especially the

4 The theme that Varanasi is the playing ground of Śiva and his consort goes back to the oldest known mähātmya of Varanasi which has recently been edited and published by Bakker and Isaacson (2004).

5 Actually, the Kāśīkhaṇḍa, and many other similar texts, does not use the terms pilgrim or pilgrimage very often, but rather speaks about the persons who dwell in Kāśī (kaśivasi), or uses various constructions implying that people go to or visit Kāśī.



Ma ikar ikā cremation ghā . Photo © Erik Reenberg Sand 2010.



later Purā ic māhātmyas which are, in a way, whole textual statements of the merits to be gained from reciting or listening to various religious texts like the Bhāgavāta Purā a or the Bhagavadgītā, or from worshipping various deities or visiting various sacred places.

Compared to the earlier Vedic or Brahmanic texts most of these texts agree in inflating the merits earned by the observances or rituals described. One way of doing so is to compare them to Vedic or Brahmanic rituals. Another way is to compare them to ascetic behaviour, thus making simple popular observances or rituals equal to those of the classical traditions of Hinduism. This was a way of empowering both the common man and his popular rituals, and, of course, also the Brahmins who stood to gain from officiating at these rituals, conferring upon them the legitimacy of the religious elites. The same is the case with pilgrimage (tīrthayātra), which in general is seen as a popular ritual available not only to the religious and social elites but also to the common man. One could mention many examples of this strategy of equalizing pilgrimage with classic behaviour and rituals in the Kāśikha a, but here I shall only give a very general example. Vi ū, in one passage asks Śiva for the following boons:

Whatever purifying things are told in the Vedas (śruti), O Sadāśiva, let this sacred place be more excellent than those, O Three-eyed one.

And whatever merit there is from the study of the four Vedas, that merit shall be produced from reciting a hundred thousand Gāyatrīs in Kāśī.

Besides, whatever merit is produced from the study of the eight limbs of yoga (a ā gayoga), let that merit and more be produced from visiting Kāśī with faith<sup>6</sup> (KK IV.1.26.83–5).

In this example the power of Kāśī is compared to the purifying rituals of the entire Vedic tradition, and, more specifically, the recital in Kāśī of one single verse of the Veda, the famous Gāyatrī-mantra ( gveda 3.62.10), which is recited by many orthodox Hindus daily, is compared to the entire Vedic tradition. Similarly, the efficiency of pilgrimage to Kāśī is compared to the practice

6 yānikānipavitrā iśrutyuktānisadāśiva/tebhyo'dhikatarā cāstuk etrametattrilocana  
// catur ām api vedānā pu yam adhyayanāc ca yat / tat pu ya jāyatā kāśyā  
gāyatrīlak ajāpyata // a ā gayogābhyāsenā yat pu yam api jāyate / tat pu ya  
sādhikā bhūyāc chraddhākāśīni eva āt //

of classical yoga, which may here be taken to represent the non-worldly ascetic and yogic practices.

## The merits of pilgrimage to Kāśī

After having characterized the genre of Kāśīkhaṇḍa's descriptions of the fruits of pilgrimage, or, perhaps, one should add, staying in Varanasi (kāśivāsa), let us now turn to investigate what the fruits are that the text attributes to visiting this place. Here we should, perhaps, add that the conceptual frame of the text is of course the idea of karman; in other words, the idea that all actions or deeds have effects on our future existence both in the life consequent upon this birth and in the next one.

In general, one gets the impression from reading the 31 pages which describe the merits of Kāśī in the form of Avimukta, Maṅglikā and Gaṅgā that there is no limit to them, or, as the text says:

How is it possible for me with my six mouths to tell the glory of Avimukta which even the thousand faced [snake of the primeval ocean] is not able to do (KK IV.1.25.78)?<sup>7</sup>

The following can, therefore, only be an extract hereof.

The text itself gives a brief but fine classification of the mechanism of merit and its results at the end of its glorification of Kāśī as Avimukta with the following verse:

Which wise man would not at the end [i.e. at death] take refuge to Kāśī which is destroying a flood of great sins, causing accumulation of merits, [and] conferring worldly pleasures and release (KK IV.1.25.76).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, on the level of karman, Kāśī, on the one hand, has the power to destroy the bad karman which the pilgrim may have accumulated in this and in earlier lives. This bad karman is called pāpa in Sanskrit which may be translated as 'sin', if one is aware that such a translation ought not to carry Christian

7 avimuktasya mähātmya ā abhir vaktrai katha mayā / vaktu śakya na śaknoti sahasrāsyo 'pi yat param //

8 mahāpāpaughaśamanī pu yopacayakāri ī / bhuktimuktipradām anteko na kāśī sudhī śrayet //

connotations.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Kāśī also has the power to increase the good *karman* of the pilgrim which in Sanskrit is called *puṇya*, a term that is best translated by 'merit'. At the level of the future results of these karmic effects, the results may be paid back to the pilgrim either in the form of worldly pleasures (*bhukti*), meaning pleasures to be enjoyed in this world, or in the form of release after death (*mukti*).

The text does not give many express illustrations of the case that pilgrimage to Kāśī removes already accumulated sins, but, perhaps, one example was sufficient to the author, namely the most heinous crime a Brahman could think of, the murder of a Brahman (*brahmahatyā*) which is probably here taken as representing the five Hindu cardinal crimes (*mahāpātaka*), which are: killing a Brahman, drinking liquor, theft, adultery with the wife of one's teacher, and associating with one guilty of these four crimes:

Indeed, if a Brāhmaṇa-killer accidentally were to go to the city Varanasi, [his sin of] brāhmaṇa-murder will vanish because of the greatness of that sacred place (KK IV.1.25.66).<sup>10</sup>

Now, one might, perhaps, expect that the text then would be full of examples of accumulation of merits, but that is not the case either. However, the following passage from the chapter on *Maikarīkā* combines both destruction of evils and accumulation of merit:

Viṣṇu said:

O Lord of gods, what is the fate after death of a person who does not really know the glorification of the sacred place [Kāśī], and who dies without faith?

Śiva said:

If an unfaithful and ignorant person dies here having committed many and very great sins elsewhere, and not being even conversant with the greatness of this sacred place, what fate has been pointed out for him, listen to that, O Janārdana, of excellent vows.

The heap of sins of a person who is entering the *pañcakrośī* would stay outside. By no means can they enter inside.

9 Other words for negative *karman* used by the text are *agha*, 'impurity' and *enas*, 'offence'. Both are used in the passage KK IV.1.26.111–16, quoted below.

10 *brahmahāyo'bhigacched vai daivād vārāśī purim / tasya ketrasya mähätmyād brahmahatyā nivartate //*



Ma ikaṛ ikā cremation ghāṭ. Photo © Erik Reenberg Sand 2010.

His heap of sins is staying outside because of fear of the Gaṇas roaming the border with tridents and nooses in their hands.

By entering he becomes sinless, free from all sins, [and] having bathed in the Ma ikaṛ ikā, he obtains the unsurpassed merit.<sup>11</sup> (KK IV.1.26.111–16.)

In this passage we are told that immediately upon crossing the so-called Pañcakrośī perimeter which marks off the sacred area (kṛetra) of Kāśī, the pilgrim is freed of his sins, because the border of the sacred place is protected by Gaṇas who are attendants of Śiva.<sup>12</sup> Freed of his sins, he only starts accumulating positive karman when he starts performing rituals, in this case when he bathes in the pond called Ma ikaṛ ikā near the great cremation ghāṭ passing under the same name. Thus, this passage interestingly introduces a sequence,

11 111 viśvur uvāca: deveśa kṛetramāhātmya yo na jānāti tattvata / na śraddadhāti mriyatem tetasyehakāgati //112śivauvāca: anyatruk tvāpānibahūnisumahānti ca / aśraddadhāno 'tattvajño yady atra ca vipadyate // 113 mahimany anabhijño 'pi kṛetrāsyaśyajanārdana/tasyayāgatiruddiātā niśāmayasuvrata//114pañcakrośī pravīśatas tasya pātakasantati / bahir eva prati heta nāntar nivīśate kva cit // 115 bhayād bahi sthitāyā ca tasya pātakasantatau / trīśūlapāśapā īnā ga ānā śimacāri ām // 116 praveśamātrād anagha sarvair enobhir ujjhita / sa snāya ma ikaṛ ikā pu ya prāpnoty anuttamam //

12 For these gaṇas and their relationship with Kāśī, see Eck 1983.

or ritual structure, between the two different aspects of the power of Kāśī; the power to remove bad karman and the power to bestow merit.

From this perspective, a relevant question would be what happens to the people who have entered Kāśī and thus have been released from their previous sins, but who instead of accumulating merit by performing rituals, commit more sins? Although it is not a question with which the Kāśīkha is as much occupied, the following passage shows that some of the authors have given the question a thought. The passage is put into the mouth of Śīva:

Having committed sins in Kāśī, if a person should die in Kāśī, after having been a Rudrapīśāca<sup>13</sup> he will again obtain release (mukti).

For men who die in Kāśī because of fate, even though they have committed sins, for them there is no question of falling into hell, because I am their chastiser.<sup>14</sup> (KK IV.1.26.41–2.)

From this we may conclude that although entering Kāśī may well destroy our previous sins it does not mean that sins which we may commit while staying there do not have any consequences. They do. In the quotation, this is clear by the fact that the sinner will have to suffer rebirth as a piśāca, or demon, before he is ready for release. On the other hand, the text assures us, that the fact that the sins are committed in Kāśī ameliorates the consequences in comparison with sins committed elsewhere. Thus, the punishment of hell (naraka) is not possible for the one who sins in Kāśī.

If, as mentioned earlier, the text does not often illustrate the accumulation of merits in itself, it prefers instead to do so by extolling the results that Kāśī bestows on the pilgrims. As we saw in the above quotation, these results, in the terminology of the text, consists of worldly pleasures and release (bhukti and mukti). This pair is very often mentioned together in phalaśrutis in Purāṇas and mātmyas, meaning that the results may either be this-worldly, that is, material, or soteriological, that is, dealing with the next world.

Although many pilgrims may visit Kāśī in order to fulfil desires of this world, for example, in order to get offspring, this is evidently not something that the authors of the Kāśīkha were much concerned about. The focus is

13 Or 'terrifying piśāca'?

14 k tvā'pikāśyā pāpānikāśyāmevamriyate cet/bhūtvā rudrapīśāco'pīpunar muktīm avāpsyati//kāśyā m tānā jantūnā daivāt pāpak tām api / na pāto narake te ā te ā śāstāham eva yat//



Pilgrims bathing in the Ma'ikar'ikāku'ā at the Mahāśivarātri festival. Photo © Erik Reenberg Sand 2010.

clearly on the other-worldly gains which Kāśī may give to the pilgrims, and for which it is still famous today.

Especially the idea that Kāśī is able to confer release from transmigration (mukti) is prominent. For example, Śiva in one place (KK IV.1.25.35) teaches the goddess that there are three means of release,<sup>15</sup> namely the yoga of the Pāśupatas, who smear themselves with ashes, the white and black ford (sitāsita), which, according to Monier Monier-Williams (1974), is identical with Prayāga or Allahabad, and, finally, Avimukta, or Kāśī, which bestows release.

Furthermore, three verses at the end of the introductory chapter about Avimukta make Kāśī's position as a special means of release quite clear:

Whoever, with his mind not directed elsewhere, does not abandon that sacred place, he avoids old age and death [and] the intolerable dwelling in a womb.

15 Here the expression nirvā'ā, which most often is associated with Buddhism, is used instead of mukti.

If an intelligent man does not want rebirth again on earth, he should go to Avimukta which is frequented by gods, is and ga as.

One should not abandon Avimukta, which frees from fear of worldly existence.<sup>16</sup> Having arrived at the god Viśveśvara one is not born again.<sup>17</sup> (KK IV.1.25.68–70.)

According to the author of this passage, Kāśī clearly confers release on men, but the condition seems to be that he does not leave it again, or, that he dwells there at the moment of death. The same was also expressed in the passage with which we began our analysis and which said: 'Which wise man would not at the end (i.e. at death) take refuge to Kāśī', and, already at the beginning of our text, Skanda in his introduction said:

There is peace in the great sacred place Avimukta, which is protected by the three-eyed one (i.e. Śiva), where Virūpāk a, or Śiva, is in person giving release (mok a) to those whose life is going to its end.<sup>18</sup> (KK IV.1.25.20)

What then, one may ask, if people, as is the case with most pilgrims, do not stay and die in Kāśī, but instead go back to their homes? Obviously, the authors of the Kāśīkha a have thought about this, because the passage KK IV.1.26.105–9 deals with what happens with people who die elsewhere. KK IV.1.26.108–9 tells us that a person who has stayed for a long time in Kāśī, but because of fate dies elsewhere, will reach heaven and then be reborn as a king and come back to the sacred city to obtain release. Similarly, KK IV.1.26.105–7 says that a person who remembers Kāśī when he dies, though it may be far away and though he may be a sinner, will reach heaven and be reborn as a

16 The wording of some of the passages about death, transmigration, and release has an almost Buddhist flavour, speaking about birth, old age, death, and fear of worldly existence. Similarly, the immediately following passages (KK IV.1.25.74–5) describes the man dying in Kāśī as 'realizing that human life is not permanent (aśāsvata)', that 'Avimukta is destructive of the fear of worldly existence (sa sārabhayanāśana)', and that man here 'meets the termination of misery' (du khānta).

17 ananyamānasobhūtvātatk etra yonamuñjati/samuñjatijarām tyu garbhavāsa sudu saham//avimukta ni evetadevar iga asevitam/yadicchenmānavodhīmān na punar janana bhuvī// avimukta na muñceta sa sārabhayamocanam / prāpya viśveśvara deva na sa bhūyo 'bhijāyate //

18 avimuktemahāk etrek emantryak e arak ite/yatrak ī āyu ā sāk ādvirūpāk o'sti mok ada //



Ghā iyā priests at the steps of the Ga gā, ready to serve bathers and pilgrims taking care of their clothes as well as performing simple rituals. Photo © Erik Reenberg Sand 2010.

king and come back to Kāśī and get release. Although the observances which produce merit are different in these two cases, the relationship with Kāśī is common, and likewise is the result of the merit, namely heaven, rebirth, and final release. Both point to the fact that one does not obtain immediate release if one does not die in Kāśī, but on the other hand the relationship with Kāśī frees one from sins and secures heaven.

The idea that people who die whilst dwelling in Kāśī will attain release is probably one of the most characteristic elements in the concepts and practices connected with this sacred place, setting it apart from most other Hindu sacred places, perhaps with the exception of Prayāga or Allahabad which, before the advent of the Muslims, was famous for its ak ayava a-tree, a huge Banyan tree (*ficus indica*), from which people committed suicide by throwing themselves down from its branches (Dubey 2001: 51–73).<sup>19</sup> The idea that Kāśī is the right place to die is still very strong among Hindus and attracts many people to Kāśī in order to die here and get release. To serve these pilgrims several hospices for old and dying people have been erected, for example, the

19 For religious suicide more generally, see Dubey 2001 and Sircar 1971.



so-called *Mumuk ubhavan*, the abode of those who desire to be released, near *Asi Ghā*.<sup>20</sup>

How can it be that people who die in *Varanasi* get release from the cycle of birth and death? According to the authors of our text, it is due to the presence of *Śiva*, and we are told that at the time of death people lose their memory and in the moment that the soul departs from the body *Viśveśvara*, or *Śiva*, confers upon it a special mantra called *tāraka brahma* by which the deceased becomes able to identify himself with the divine and get release. The name *Tāraka* means ‘carrying over’ or ‘rescuing’, and the idea of this mantra is still alive among modern pilgrims as there is a temple for *Śiva* in his form as *Tārakeśvara*, the Rescuing Lord, near the *Ma ikar ikā* tank.<sup>21</sup>

Another connection with death, which the authors of the *Kāśīkha* attribute to *Kāśī*, is the cult of ancestors, or *pit s*. Thus, every pilgrim in *Kāśī* is recommended to offer rice balls to his ancestors (*śrāddha*).<sup>22</sup> Since, however, this feature is not specific for *Kāśī* and, furthermore, is not directly contributing to one’s own release, we shall not deal in more detail with it here.



Tārakeśvara-temple with the Tārakeśvara-li ga, covered by a bronze mask. Photo © Erik Reenberg Sand 2010.

20 For a detailed description of such phenomena, see Justice 1997.

21 See Sherring 2001, Kane 1968, Eck 1983, Lannoy 2002, Gutschow & Michaels 1993, and Singh & Rana 2002.

22 See, e.g., KK IV.1.27.38–9, and KK IV.1.28.7–22, both of which refer to the banks of the *Ga gā*.

## Differentiation of merits

It turns out, however, that all is not as simple as these programmatic announcements of the wonderful effects of pilgrimage to, or staying in Kāśī will let us believe. Thus, a later passage of the first chapter of our text (KK IV.1.25.59–65) informs us that such things as the right attitude of mind, that is, mental purity and self control, knowledge of Kāśī, faith, and also the time spent in Kāśī are important in measuring the merit received.

Furthermore, the next chapter of our text, dealing with the origins and effects of *Ma ikar ikā* (KK IV.1.26), becomes still more prosaic in also introducing various rituals, such as recital of the sacred *Gāyatrī* mantra, feeding thousands of people, and gifts of wealth in the hierarchy of merits to be earned. So in actual life, mere dwelling in Kāśī is obviously not enough for the Brahmanic authors of our text. The pilgrims had also better contribute to the existence and wealth of the local *paśas* and Brahmins.

All in all, the text is a composite work of several authors and cannot be expected to display total internal agreement, as is also the case with most



South Indian pilgrims performing ancestral offerings (*śrāddha*) at Kedāra Ghāṭ. Photo © Erik Reenberg Sand 2010.

other belief systems. For example, the idea of Kāśī as the place of release is also differentiated by the text.

Most contradictory to the main spirit of the text is, perhaps, the single verse which almost defiantly says:

O Viśva, constant dwelling in Avimukta is capable of uprooting karman.  
Only in case of two or three purifying persons does it generate release  
(nirvāṇa) (KK IV.1.26.110).<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article, we have analyzed a small part of a text which, although it was authored by Brahmins and written in Sanskrit, has had, and still has, great influence on the conception of Varanasi among many Hindus all over India. The chapters we have chosen for our analysis deal mainly with the fruits of performing pilgrimage to Varanasi, or Kāśī, as it is called in this text. Given some agreement between this text and modern practices, it could tell us something about the motives of modern pilgrims to Varanasi. In our analysis we found that the sacred power of Varanasi has three sources: the eternal presence of Śiva from the time of creation, the cremation ghāṭ and the presence of the river Gaṅgā. Furthermore, we found that the most characteristic thing about the power of Varanasi is its connection with death and its power to confer on the pilgrim the fruit of complete release from the circle of birth, death, and rebirth, something which is normally the privilege of the adherents of ascetic and other non-worldly systems. This feature is still reflected in the fact that many elderly people come to Varanasi in order to die and get cremated here, and many people from the surrounding areas still take the bodies of their dead relatives to Varanasi for cremation. If people cannot manage to have their deceased relatives cremated in Varanasi, some may still take their ashes to Varanasi in order to have them immersed there in the waters of the river Gaṅgā.

In addition to this, we also found that the authors of the Kāśīkhaṇḍa, in their zeal to propagate their sacred city, tried to construct an ingenious system of ideas incorporating their rituals with the ideology of karman and involving ideas about both the destruction of sins and the accumulation of

23 viśva'vimukte sa vāsa karmanirmūlanakāma / dvitrāṇā hi pavitrāṇā  
nirvāṇāyeha jāyate //

merits, a system which, seen from their perspective should be viewed as an alternative to and an improvement upon both the Vedic tradition and the tradition of the ascetic and non-worldly traditions. In this way the authors offered the common man an easy means of salvation, although the main aim of their endeavour probably was to propagate and legitimate pilgrimage to Kāśī, especially at a time when this institution might have been threatened by Muslim invasions, and in this way help empowering themselves and the local Brahmins.

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## The Royal Pilgrimage of the Goddess Nanda

### Introduction: the goddess and her pilgrimage

Once every twelve years, when it is thought that some calamity has taken place because of the curse of the goddess Nanda Devi, a four-horned ram is born in the fields of the former king of Garhwal, an erstwhile Central Himalayan kingdom in north India (see map of Garhwal). This four-horned ram leads a procession of priests and pilgrims on the most dangerous and spectacular pilgrimage in all of India: a three-week, barefoot journey of one-hundred and sixty-four miles, during some of the worst weather of the year, at the end of the rainy season. The procession reaches Rupkund, a small pond located at an altitude of more than 5,000 metres, which is surrounded by human skeletons, and from there it goes yet further, to Homkund, the 'Lake of the Fire Sacrifice'. According to the faithful, the four-horned ram leaves the procession at that point and finds its way, unaided, to the summit of Mount Trishul.

As its name suggests, the Royal Procession is closely associated with the ruler of this erstwhile Himalayan kingdom: he attends its inaugural rituals, the bones that litter the shores of Rupkund are believed to be those of one of his ancestors, and the chief sponsor of the event is a local 'Prince' who is thought to be descended from the first kings of Garhwal. This Prince traverses the domain of his ancestors and thereby lays claim to it in the name of the goddess Nanda, who is not only his lineage goddess but was also the royal goddess of the neighbouring kingdom of Kumaon, in pre-colonial times.

Although the Royal Procession ideally fosters social integration, it was disrupted in 1987 by a quarrel between two factions of priests. The goddess's itinerary, the culminating date of the pilgrimage, the type of sacrifice to be performed, the order of procession, the participation of previously excluded persons, and the competency of certain ritual specialists—all were subjects of heated dispute between the rival groups.

What was the reason for this quarrel? Participants told me more than once that the whole idea of the Progress was to create unity, yet in the event they were torn apart by an acrimonious dispute. So why were they quarrelling if it was 'only' a ritual, a matter of mere symbols? Although we often distinguish

between the realms of 'politics' and 'ritual', and although many social scientists would balk at the idea that they are one and the same, I want to argue that in many cases, they pervade each other: ritual is politics and politics is ritual.

One of the main political effects of Nanda Devi's processions is to define specific units of territory. The Royal Procession is not the only local procession of Nanda Devi: there are also a number of one-day processions that typically join only a few villages together, and there are also larger processions lasting one to two weeks. But the Royal Procession occurs but once in a generation, and it is more demanding, costly, and spectacular than any of the smaller, annual processions. It traverses the largest unit of territory, and by traversing it, it defines it.

The relation between the goddess and the king is an ancient one. For more than a thousand years, the goddess Nanda was intimately associated with the rulers of the central Himalayas. The most ancient local dynasties attributed their good fortune to her, and local kings gave her gifts of land right up to



the modern period. In the seventeenth century, the king of neighbouring Kumaon stole a famous Garhwali idol of Nanda Devi, believing that possession and worship of it would guarantee his victory over the Garhwalis. Later on, the Kumaoni armies' battle-cry was 'Victory to Nandadevi!' (Atkinson 1974, II: 566; Sax 1991: 167–8). It is difficult to know just how old this tradition is. One of the rulers of the earliest known local dynasty, the Katyuris, already styled himself the *paramabhakta* or 'greatest devotee' of Nanda Devi in the mid-ninth century (Kielhorn 1896: 179, 183; Sircar 1956: 179, 282, 287–8). The *Devi Purana*, which Hazra (1942: 9) dates as 'no later than 850 a.d.', describes a local geography of pilgrimage that may well incorporate the pilgrimage (Hazra 1962: 351). And there are inscriptions in nearby temples dating between the eighth and tenth centuries, which suggest that at that time, at least some ascetics were committing acts of ritual suicide to Nanda Devi (Sircar 1959: 253; cf. Dabral 1965–78, III: 477). But whatever the antiquity of the tradition, it is clear that a succession of kings, genealogists and priests believed that the power of the king flowed from the goddess Nanda, and this sort of royal goddess cult is quite common in India, where Hindu rulers have frequently attributed their military success and economic prosperity to their tutelary goddesses, who are embodiments of *shakti*, or female energy and brilliance.

But just as worship of Nanda Devi brings about success and prosperity, so ignoring her brings about failure and catastrophe. Indeed the Royal Procession is motivated by a 'curse' or 'blight' that she inflicts upon her natal kingdom of Rishasau when she is ignored. Here is an excerpt from my translation of the local song that explains the reasons for her pilgrimage:

The Goddess's curse lies heavy on Rishasau.  
 In Rishasau town, a bad time has begun.  
 The cows that they breed bear buffalo calves,  
 the buffalos they breed bear tottering cow calves.  
 Their cows have no milk, their minds have no spark,  
 their fields have no grain, their kingdom has no wealth.  
 The twelve old sages got very concerned.  
 The twelve sages' formal assembly convened.  
 The twelve elder sages said: 'Whence comes this curse?'  
 They summoned a Brahman from faraway Gaya,  
 they summoned a scholar from the city of Kashi.  
 The pandits thus summoned then counted and asked,  
 and found that the curse came from Nanda Devi,  
 that girl Nanda who lives on Kailash.



In order to restore prosperity and harmony, the king is compelled to lay on a feast for Nanda Devi and escort her back to Mount Kailash, and this is the origin of the Royal Procession. It begins at Nanda's temple in Nauti village in Chandpur, and is organized by the Nautiyal Brahmans of the same place. Because geographical factors are so important in my analysis, I shall henceforth refer to the Nautiyals as 'Lowlanders.' The Lowlanders base their authority to manage the Royal Procession upon their relation to the kings of Garhwal. They claim descent from one of twelve Brahmans who were settled by the dynastic founder in twelve villages around the old fort in Chandpur. The castes descended from these twelve are collectively known as the Twelve-Place Brahmans, and are the highest-ranked local caste. Because the Lowlanders served as royal gurus or religious preceptors of the king, they are first among the Twelve-Place Brahmans, and are thus the highest-ranked caste in Garhwal. Once every generation, each of the Twelve-Place Brahman lineages chooses a representative, who takes up a bamboo parasol, and joins the Royal Procession at a predetermined point in Chandpur. During the three weeks of the pilgrimage, the procession is led by the mysterious four-horned ram, regarded as an incarnation of the goddess, herself the source of royal power. The ram is followed by the Royal Parasol, a symbol of the king and his descendant the Prince. Next come the parasols of the Twelve-Place Brahmans, followed by hundreds of pilgrims, most of whom are farmers of the dominant local caste. Drummers from the lowest castes also accompany the procession as far as the final village of Bhala, thereby completing an assemblage that represents all the castes in Garhwal. If ever there was a Durkheimian 'collective representation,' this is it: a representation by society, of itself, to itself. In this public, ritual event, the entire society publicly defines itself, so that the order of procession has very definite political implications. Similar processions have taken place throughout South Asian history. In medieval India, Hindu kings 'took possession' of their realms by processing to their borders (Gupte 1919: 180–3; Underhill 1921: 56–7), and the famous Perahāra procession of Sri Lanka still summarizes the kingdom's social, political, economic, and religious systems (Seneviratne 1978). In a similar fashion, the Royal Pilgrimage takes possession of the land for Nanda Devi, and in so doing, it re-creates and re-unites the old kingdom in which the social system of Garhwal originated.

The Royal Procession is, however, clearly distinct from Nanda Devi's smaller, annual processions. Several of these occur inside the boundaries of *patti*<sup>1</sup> that were formerly included in the kingdom—and here, too, the pro-

1 A traditional land-division, analogous to the *parganah* of the north Indian plains.

cessions define these districts by circumambulating their borders. The longest and best known of these smaller, annual processions is the annual ‘Small Progress’ of Nanda of Pratyeka *patti*. The Small Progress begins in the village of Thal, and traverses the *patti*. The priests of this procession were the core of one of the two opposing factions in the Royal Procession of 1987; the Lowlanders of Chandpur were the other. I shall refer to the Thal Brahmans and their allies from Pratyeka as the Highlanders.

Geography is important in several ways here, as is illustrated by the map. To begin with, both pilgrimages share a geography that is charged with mythic significance. From Jogmaya to Bedani, they both move along a path that was the site of Nanda Devi’s battle with the buffalo demon—this is one of the most powerful and well-known myths in all of Hinduism, perhaps best-known as the story of Durga’s defeat of Mahishasura as told in the *Devi-Mahatmya*. But in the pilgrimage, this pan-Indian myth is clearly localized: not only does it occur in local places, but it is related to the local system of kinship. Chandpur is considered to be Nanda Devi’s natal place, and Pratyeka is her husband’s place. The Lowlanders and their fellow-pilgrims from Chandpur are Nanda’s natal relations, while the Highlanders and others from Pratyeka are her ‘husband’s people’. The dispute in the 1987 pilgrimage began only after the Royal Procession crossed the border between Chandpur and Pratyeka.

Geography, kinship and mythology are so inextricably intertwined here that it hardly pays to disentangle them. The Royal Procession of the Lowlanders begins in Chandpur near the old fort of the original king of Garhwal, whereas the Small Progress of the Highlanders begins in the politically insignificant village of Thal and traverses only one district. The Royal Procession uses vegetarian worship, while the Small Progress includes buffalo sacrifice. The Lowlanders derive their authority from the king while the Highlanders derive theirs from their relatively low-ranking occupation as priests. And finally, the lowlanders are thought of as the natal relations of the goddess Nanda, while the Highlanders consider themselves the people of her husband, Shiva.

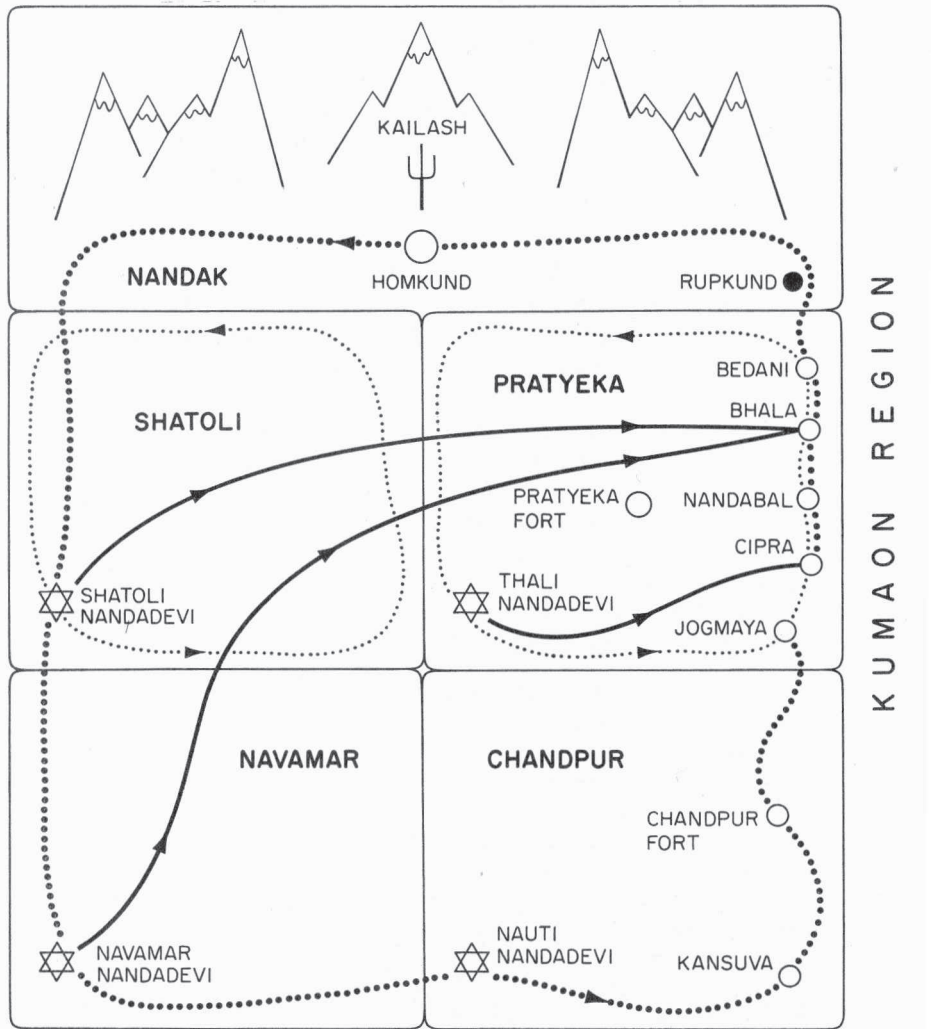
In 1986, these distinctions were the basis of a bitter factional dispute. This dispute was only the latest episode in a long rivalry between the Lowlanders and the Highlanders. I haven’t the space to describe it fully in this chapter, but in effect it comes down to three factors. First of all is the matter of caste: although the Highlanders belong to the highest *varna*—that of Brahman priests—they are ranked rather low within it. The Highlanders consume meat and liquor, allow brideprice and the remarriage of widows, and perform animal sacrifice, while the Lowlanders are vegetarian, abhor the remarriage of widows, and are prominent crusaders against animal sacrifice. All of these

customs mark the Highlanders as ‘backward’ and ‘low’ in contrast to the Lowlanders, who are thought of as progressive and urbane. The two groups are also class rivals, since many Lowlanders are professionals and government servants, while the Highlanders follow less prestigious occupations such as farming and being priests. Nevertheless—or perhaps precisely because of these differences—the Highlanders cling to their exclusive authority as priests of Nanda Devi. They insist that only they may touch her image, and they deny this privilege to the proud Lowlanders. In short, they claim to have sole authority as priests of Nanda Devi, and in the 1987 Royal Procession, they asserted this claim against the Lowlanders.

For their part, the Lowlanders publicly and loudly criticize what they call the ‘uncivilized’ and ‘unlearned’ customs of the Highlanders, especially animal sacrifice. Several years ago, they invited the Highlanders to a festival in Chandpur. They paid for the Highlanders’ bus tickets, food and lodging—and all of this was done in order to ‘educate’ them in the virtues of vegetarian worship. There was a public row, and the mutual resentment of the two groups increased.



Schematic map of Nanda Devi's pilgrimages in Uttarakhand (Sax 1991: 48).



Schematic Map of Nandadevi's Pilgrimages in Uttarakhand

- ..... Route of the Royal Pilgrimage (Nanda of Chandpur)
- Routes of regional Nandadevis during Royal Pilgrimage
- ..... Routes of annual pilgrimages
- Patti border
- ☆ Nandadevi temple

In 1986, when it was certain that the Royal Procession would occur, both groups began to use the local media as a forum for their dispute. In a series of articles and letters to the editors of local newspapers, the Highlanders complained that they had been excluded from the deliberations of the Royal Procession Committee and that no funds had been spent in or near their own village. They alleged that certain 'big-shots' among the Lowlanders had perverted the Royal Procession tradition for their own ends, and they even threatened a lawsuit. Later, the Highlanders distributed a poster in which they promulgated a separate programme for the Royal Procession. According to the new itinerary, their own Nanda Devi, the Nanda of Pratyeka, would lead the procession, which would conclude a day later than had been planned, and she would be worshipped by means of animal sacrifice. In effect, the Highlanders were claiming authority to determine the itinerary, dates, and forms of worship, something for which the Lowlanders had always been responsible in the past. The Lowlanders' response was quite restrained, and this may have a crucial mistake. Perhaps they did not take the Highlanders' challenge seriously; possibly they saw a new opportunity to humble their rivals; in any event they merely drafted a letter, asking the Highlanders to abide by the programme that had already been decided, at a meeting that had in fact been attended by two of the Highlanders' representatives. 'The committee insists,' they wrote, 'that you kindly give your whole-hearted support to this Great Pilgrimage.' But this was a vain hope.

### The 1987 Royal Procession

The Royal Procession was inaugurated in the autumn of 1986, when the Prince,<sup>2</sup> regarded as a descendant of the former King, fashioned a silken parasol and took it to the temple of Nanda Devi in Nauti. He asked the goddess's permission to do the pilgrimage. After that came two omens that convinced local persons that Nanda's curse had fallen. First was the miraculous birth of a four-horned ram, which is regarded as an incarnation of Nanda Devi herself, and is treated with great reverence. Second was a drought—the worst to have hit India in decades. Because these events happened *after* the Prince had

2 The *adhyaksh* or 'chairperson' of the Royal Procession Committee is always a member of the Kunvar caste, from the village of Kansua near the old fortress in Chandpur. He is regarded as a descendant of the king, and has final responsibility for the organization and successful completion of the Royal Procession. I refer to him here as 'the Prince.'

made his formal request for the Royal Procession, everyone was convinced that the curse of Nanda had taken effect.

*Everyone* came for the Royal Procession. Journalists from near and far materialized with still cameras, audio recorders and video cameras. A cabinet minister arrived by helicopter, and the four-horned ram showed up in a chartered taxi. Two men in their nineties walked all those icy miles barefoot, and young hiking-clubbers clambered in from Calcutta festooned with the latest high-altitude equipment. A private filmmaker from Bombay followed the four-horned ram all the way from Nauti to Rupkund, and many local farmers brought rams that were sacrificed in the heights, and did not return. High and low, rich and poor, politicians and pilgrims, goddesses and demons, they were all there. Even the rains came on schedule: ten minutes after the procession left Nauti on the first day, it was inundated by the fiercest rainstorm of the summer, one that was badly needed in that year of drought.

Led by the Royal Parasol, the Lowlanders left Nanda's temple for the Prince's village about ten kilometres away, where the four-horned ram was waiting. Next morning we crossed a river, and handed the parasol over to a new group of priests, who carried it the rest of the way. One young man carried it most of the time. He was Nanda Devi's oracle, and much of the time he was in a state of trance. Villagers would approach the parasol and the oracle would begin to tremble and shake; then someone would lift him onto their shoulders and he—I ought to say, 'she', since it is thought that at this point Nanda Devi herself was speaking—would bless her devotees, answer their questions, and so forth. The oracle's stamina was remarkable. He was clothed very lightly, he was barefoot, he ate a very light meal only once each evening, and yet he remained possessed by the goddess for several hours each day, in the sun and in the pouring rain. At higher elevations there were, in addition to this priest, perhaps fifty or seventy-five other oracles, associated with numerous local deities, in our procession of several-thousand pilgrims.

Along the path we were joined by twelve more parasols, which represented the Twelve-Place Brahmans who were settled in the area by the original king of Garhwal. We processed for weeks, from village to village. In some places the procession would halt for ten or fifteen minutes, just time enough to receive offerings and give blessings. Elsewhere we would stop for one or two hours, and be feasted by the villagers, though of course the children always ate first.

For the first week, everything went smoothly. But as we drew nearer to the Highlanders' territory of Pratyeka, rumours began to circulate that the four-horned ram had died and a false one had been substituted for it. When



The Lowlanders' oracle of Nanda Devi. Photo © William Sax.

Nanda Devi reached Jogmaya a local Prince, the opposite number of the Prince of Chandpur, prostrated before her, lifted her onto his head in a sign of submission and carried her to the temple, followed by a cheering throng of villagers.

However, the mood quickly changed. Several Highlanders had come, demanding that the procession be delayed a day, and that a buffalo sacrifice be performed. During the Royal Procession, and only during the Royal Procession, a geometrical representation of Nanda Devi called a *yantra* is un-earthed on *kalaratri*, the 'night of death'. This *yantra* represents Nanda Devi in her fierce form as the blood-drinking goddess Kali, and traditionally a buffalo was sacrificed to her in this form, but blood sacrifice of this kind is now fiercely opposed by the Lowlanders.

The Prince of Chandpur was quickly surrounded by a group of angry Highlanders, but he continued to insist that they would offer no living being to Nanda Devi. Finally the crowd desisted. 'The curse has fallen on them,' they said, 'not us. Let them do as they wish.' However, the Lowlanders were informed that arrangements for their food and lodging in the days ahead would be cancelled. One of the Prince's advisors took him aside, and warned him

that from that point on, he should take care of three things: the four-horned ram, the Royal Parasol, and himself.

Soon the bazaar was buzzing with the news. I drifted from conversation to conversation, eavesdropping on the debates taking place in the street. One of the Lowlanders said, 'The Highlanders are only interested in two things: meat and liquor,' to which a Highlander replied, 'Now you'll get your comeuppance—just try and proceed without our permission.' I spotted two of the Lowlanders' leaders walking down the street, and asked what was happening. One of them grasped my elbow and led me to a small shop where their priests were sitting. They listened forlornly as their leader explained the situation. When he was done, he looked at the head priest and said they would depend on the goddess to tell them what to do.

The priest began to beseech the goddess. 'Show us the way, Devi, show us the path, tell us what should be done!' Nanda Devi began to come over her oracle, who trembled and shook uncontrollably, growling with rage. Though I had seen many such trances, this one was particularly electrifying. 'Go!' shouted the priest. 'On to the temple! Show us the path, Devi! If you want animal sacrifice, we'll give it; but if you don't want it, we won't offer it!' Someone rolled up the aluminium storefront and the Lowlanders spilled into the street, first walking and then running behind their goddess, toward the temple.

When we arrived, the crowd parted like a wave. The Prince saw his goddess coming, and called out above the heads of the crowd 'Oh Devi, I'm taking you to Mount Kailash! I am under your protection! Tell me what to do!' Growling furiously, the goddess approached the temple where the Prince and the local priest were waiting. 'I am Kali!' she screamed, 'I am Kali! There will be no sacrifice!' And then something happened that I had never witnessed before. Leaning casually against a pillar in front of the temple, silhouetted against the lamps glowing within, the local priest said in a bored voice, 'This is a fake. Kali doesn't come on him. Get out. You have no place here. I am also Kali. I, too, am Kali.'

It was a standoff, but no one was prepared to back down. Finally, the Lowlanders broke with custom by appointing their own priest rather than the local one, and the Prince asked the crowd to join them in vegetarian worship. Having failed to obtain the cooperation of the local priest, the Lowlanders were unable to excavate the *yantra*.

Next day the Lowlanders arrived in the ancestral village of the Prince of Pratyeka, where both they and the Highlanders were planning to spend the night. My own feelings were highly ambivalent at this point, because I was quite close to some of the Highlanders. When I had last seen them, we had



parted with the sentimental proverb *varsom ki bheth, kedar ki jat* ('A reunion after years, a pilgrimage to Kedarnath')—which means that it is as fine and rare to meet a friend or loved one after years of separation, as it is to do a pilgrimage to the temple of Kedarnath, pictured high in the Himalayas, and now I was standing in this dusty mountain town, waiting to be reunited with my dear friends the Highlanders—and they were locked in a bitter struggle with the Lowlanders, who were my oldest and most reliable allies in India!

Some men from the bazaar came running, rounding the corner down the road, and shouting that Nanda of Pratyeka was about to arrive. The drums preceding her palanquin were growing louder. One of the Lowlanders took me aside and said that I had best talk to my friends the Highlanders, and convince them to settle this dispute. In all of Garhwal, he said, there was no other person who could be trusted to be impartial, who was on good terms with both sides. This was too much for me; it violated all my ideas about 'objective' research, and I felt panicky. 'Wait a minute,' I said. 'What can I do? I'm here only to observe!'

But our conversation was drowned out by the din of Nanda Devi's drums and bugles. People were rushing down the cobblestone path from above, clambering up from the rocky riverbank below. The Highlanders were determined to show the Lowlanders the depth of their popular support—after all, this was their territory—and they succeeded. Nanda Devi's palanquin lurched and heaved atop the shoulders of its bearers; it seemed as if it were about to burst with hot, angry energy. The crowd had swollen to large proportions in a scant few minutes; they showered Nanda Devi with flowers and supplications as they jogged alongside her up the hill toward the Prince's home. I spotted my friends the Highlanders and we embraced, even as we struggled to keep up with Nanda Devi's palanquin. She danced briefly in the courtyard, and then I went inside for an affectionate reunion with my old friends the priests. In the midst of our conversation—and quite unexpectedly—the Lowlanders' oracle stepped out of the shadows. In an emotional voice choked with tears, he began to speak:

I realize that I am younger than most of you. You could be my fathers, my uncles or elder brothers. So please pardon my boldness, and do me the kindness of listening to what I have to say. [We must all ask ourselves if this dispute will benefit any of us. Nanda] is our goddess but it's also possible that she may cease to be ours, if we do not behave properly and if we don't do the pilgrimage well.

There was grunting and hissing from the shadows beyond the alcove. A fierce deity was taking possession of one of the priests. The priest began to sob and wail as he spoke:

And O Devi, I am your devoted worshiper. . .even though I am only twenty-six. . .still I've been worshipping you for years. . .I worship you with all my heart and so far I've had no trouble. . .We should do the pilgrimage properly and it will be successful. . .

The deity lashed out: 'On the ninth, on the ninth!' but the priest continued:

If we go together our humanity will remain, but if we go as enemies, it won't remain. Perhaps you'll go on the ninth and we'll go on the eighth but, O Mother, if you have *shakti*, you show us the way!

From behind, someone called out 'Sacrifice *him*, sacrifice *him*!' and they dragged the hapless priest into the courtyard. Suddenly, and seemingly out of nowhere, the Prince of Chandpur arrived, alone and unprotected. In a calm, measured voice he said 'I am the Chairman of the Royal Procession Committee.' By this time, the Highlanders' Nanda had come over her oracle. She sat atop the shoulders of one of her devotees, head swathed in a brilliant red scarf, an iron dagger clenched between her teeth (see photo, p. 347). She removed the dagger and waved it about while addressing the Prince:

My tradition is. . .Bedani Pond on Nanda Seventh, my tradition is. . . Homkund on the Ninth. . .According to tradition the Pilgrimage (will conclude) on the ninth. Is there anything else? Speak! Speak the truth!

But the Prince was not persuaded. He stood resolutely before the goddess. He was told to hold up his hand, palm outward facing the oracle, to catch barley seeds that she would hurl at him in a common rite of augury (interpretation depends on the number of grains caught). He held up his hand but, in a stroke of theatrical genius, he didn't close his hand or catch any seeds. The oracle hurled two or three fistfuls of barley at the Prince's out-turned palm but they bounced off as he stood there, impassively. Then he began to speak, and the assembled crowd grew quiet: 'Listen to *me* everyone: I want to see both goddesses dancing together. And their decision will be binding.' A moment of silence followed, then someone said, 'Yes. The reunion will be tomorrow.'

But there was no reunion the next day, nor the next, nor the day after that. Every attempt to reconcile the two factions came to nothing, and they grew increasingly hostile. Dramatic scenes like the ones I have described were repeated daily. In one village, a local god attempted forcibly to prevent the Lowlanders' oracle from proceeding; he actually seized her sari, and only cooled down after a police officer threatened to arrest him.

After a week of constant tension we reached the village of Bhala, where we were joined by the Nanda Devis of Shatoli and Navamar, both of whom had been carried on bridal palanquins from their respective districts, along with hundreds of other local gods and goddesses. Now the big question was: who would side with the Highlanders, and who with the Lowlanders? After several more oracular exchanges of the type that I have already described, both the newly-arrived Nanda Devis, along with their entourages of priests, pilgrims and oracles, and most of the other local gods, decided to accompany the Lowlanders and their goddess on the Royal Procession. The palanquins of the three Nanda Devis, the Royal Parasol and the parasols of the Twelve-Place Brahmans, and hundreds of gods, pilgrims, trekkers and journalists left the village of Bhala, proceeded into the rocks above the treeline, and left the Highlanders behind. Having failed to achieve their object, the Highlanders waited until we had left, concluded their pilgrimage at Bedani Pond, then



The Highlanders' oracle of Nanda Devi. Photo © William Sax.

turned around and went home, just as they do every year. The Lowlanders on the other hand performed an ancestral ritual at Bedani pond for the ‘martyrs’ of Rupkund, and later that night they bivouacked on a razor-sharp ridge at 13,000 feet above sea level. Many pilgrims turned back when they realized the hardships to be endured over the next four days, but most remained to rise next morning and climb several steep miles to a ridge from where the mighty chain of the Himalayas could be seen, shining under a brilliant, cloudless sky. It had rained every day until then, so that the pilgrims attributed the fine weather to the mercy of the goddess.

Then we plodded up the valley toward Rupkund, stopping every two or three minutes to gasp for air. The local legend of the origin of the bones at Rupkund is fascinating, but too long to repeat here. The crux of the matter is that they are said to be the bones of another Royal Procession party that defied Nanda Devi’s rule against female participation, by bringing women along. Not only that, but they brought a pregnant woman—the queen herself—who polluted the pure heights of the Himalaya with vaginal blood by giving birth to a daughter during the pilgrimage. They had thus triply violated the injunction against women, by bringing dancing girls, and a pregnant queen who gave birth to a daughter. Nanda Devi was furious, and sent down a storm of ‘iron-like hail’. The army and pilgrimage party were sucked into a whirlwind



The 1987 Royal Procession, just below Kailavinayak ridge. Photo © William Sax.

and swallowed up by Rupkund, where their bones may be found even today, 600 years later.

We climbed Jyumra Gali, the ‘path of death’, the most terrifying part of the entire pilgrimage. It was surmounted by an 18,000-foot pass, the highest point of the journey. Everyone, from the four-horned ram to the most anonymous pilgrim, dragged themselves over the pass, panting for breath. Behind us was a dizzying drop, straight down to the black waters of Rupkund. In front of us was the awesome vista of high Mount Kailash, and we spent a sleepless night listening to the rumbling of its glaciers. We rose again and climbed even higher, over the glacial rubble and into the freezing heights. We were searching for Homkund, the pilgrims’ goal, which is also called Ghumaki, ‘the place where one stops wandering’. When we finally arrived, it was time to say goodbye to Nanda Devi. The eyes of the Prince and his priests were filled with tears, as they decked the four-horned ram with jewellery and sent it toward Mount Kailash. But it would not go! Time and again it returned to the humans who had fed and comforted it for weeks. Finally, one of the pilgrims carried it a couple of hundred yards up the side of the mountain and left it there. Meanwhile, the rest of the pilgrims turned around and began the long trek home.

Two long, muddy days, and many accidents later, we reached the temple of the mountain god Dyosingh in a grove of cedar trees above the village of Subas. Here, another fierce goddess scolded the exhausted pilgrims. ‘This is not a human drama’, she screamed, ‘this is my pilgrimage!’ She told them not to harbour anger in their hearts toward their rivals. ‘I have told the Highlanders’, she said, ‘and by the time you leave, you too will hear of my power.’ Indeed we heard: there had been a landslide in the Highlanders’ village two days earlier: one of the priest’s houses slid down the hill, and his mother was killed. So far as the Lowlanders were concerned, this was proof that Nanda Devi had punished the Highlanders for their arrogance.

Many ‘traditions’ were broken in the Royal Procession of 1987. One foreigner, two women, and numerous Harijans completed the pilgrimage; the *yantra* at Jogmaya was not excavated; the reunion of goddesses at Nandabal did not take place; and many other rituals were not performed because of the dispute between the rival factions. But as I discovered by talking with my fellow pilgrims, and listening to the tea shop gossip on my way back to Delhi, the failure of the four-horned ram to climb the mountain was the most disappointing of all. Many people attributed it to the feuding of the priests, saying that they had subordinated *dharma* to *rajniti*, that is, that they had subordinated religion to politics. ‘Now the Progress is no more’, they said, ‘and how will its power return?’

## Conclusion: ritual, politics, and pilgrimage

Obviously a great deal of time, money, and labour are invested in the pilgrimages of Nanda Devi, and in this respect they are similar to ritual processions the world over. Why did the kings of this impoverished Himalayan province devote so many resources to a ritual that, from our perspective, might look like a sheer waste of time? And why did the two factions quarrel so bitterly over the order of the procession? To answer these questions we must overcome a problem that plagues anthropology, and especially the anthropology of religion: the problem of 'symbol-talk'. The problem is that in many formulations, the 'symbolic' is actually the 'merely symbolic', and the so-called 'symbolic dimension' of religion and ritual often turns out to be merely an expression or a reflection of more fundamental realities. 'Real' political or economic relations are merely 'symbolized' by religion and ritual, and little or no thought is given to the ways in which ritual and religious action might, in fact, create such realities. Having invoked and dismissed 'the symbolic', the analyst is free to move on to those features he or she considers more basic, which usually turn out to be the great totems of Western social thought: wealth and power.

But ritual processions around the world clearly show us that 'symbolic' behaviour has important political consequences. In ritual processions from a variety of cultures, rulers and other important persons such as party leaders and deities create powerful relationships with territorial and social units by moving through, or across, or around them. Elsewhere in north India, Alan Beals (1964) and Peter van der Veer (1987) have shown how factional political ends are served by the processions of both village gods and Hindu monks, and these politico-ritual journeys are by no means unique to South Asia. Marshall Sahlins (1989) gives an account of the political effects of the annual Makahiki festival of Hawaii, Inga Clendinnen (1980) has described the processions organized by colonial Franciscan missionaries 'in direct competition with native agricultural gods', and Susan G. Davis (1985) shows the importance of marches and parades to the political life of Philadelphia in the early nineteenth century. In all of these ritual processions, a particular group—it may be a royal entourage, a political candidate, a missionary sector what-have-you—asserts its physical unity with a specific territory by circumambulating or traversing it. And what seems to be a 'symbolic' act comes to have immense political consequences because it is through these kinds of public, collective rituals that societies define themselves to themselves. A private procession would be like a party to which nobody came; it would have few if any social consequences. A candidate for office in Germany or Finland

must not only shake hands and kiss babies, she must be publicly seen to do so, thereby demonstrating her oneness with 'the people.' To publicly lead the procession, and to be seen to lead it, or define its form, is simultaneously to claim authority over both land and people; it is not a display of 'empty' forms or 'mere' symbols, but rather a powerful kind of political action.

This explains why religious processions are so often associated with violence, in European as well as Asian cultures. Because of the public, self-defining nature of the procession, the stakes are very high, amounting to no less than recognition of the existence of certain groups, along with their economic and political relations with each other and the territories they inhabit. To give an inch is to surrender the group's claims to authority and legitimacy—and that is why, for the Highlanders as well as the Lowlanders, nothing less than their collective prestige was at stake. That is why public marches and processions are banned by totalitarian regimes, which, by monopolizing the power of self-definition, seek to limit their opponents' power. In other words, to control the ritual is to control the definition and constitution of society and the relations between its parts—and what greater power could there be? As Thomas Szasz put it, 'In the animal kingdom, the rule is: eat or be eaten. In the human kingdom, the rule is: define, or be defined' (1974: 20).

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## The Awaited Miracle

### Reflections on Marian apparitions in Garabandal, Spain

#### Introduction

This article reflects upon Marian apparitions that occurred during the years 1961 to 1965 in the village of San Sebastián de Garabandal, or Garabandal, in northern Spain, giving rise to pilgrimages ever since. The events coincided with the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, or Vatican II. Garabandal is the only Marian apparition event to have prophesied and commented on Vatican II (Serre & Caux 2001: 256). Nevertheless, in Christendom, travelling to Garabandal is regarded as an alternative pilgrimage. Garabandal attracts only a small number of dedicated followers and pilgrims. After a visit in April 2009, the high season for pilgrimages to the village, I can confirm that few pilgrims find their way to Garabandal. On the other hand, an unexploited site such as Garabandal is attractive to pilgrims. The pilgrimage route is in several ways unique compared to journeys to other Marian pilgrimage shrines, since it has not yet been approved by the Catholic Church. Pilgrimages to Garabandal were even officially forbidden for several years. The Catholic Church authorities originally declared travelling to Garabandal as forbidden for church officials such as priests and others. Attempts were made to prevent pilgrimages by forbidding the celebration of Masses that referred to the apparitions (Nolan & Nolan 1989: 286). We ask ourselves why this was done, and we may also ask why it is no longer forbidden to do this pilgrimage. I will give an overview of the case of Garabandal through the years and reflect upon why this place is considered special in comparison to other pilgrimage sites. This study examines such aspects of pilgrimages to this village as location and motivation, the Virgin Mary and Marian apparitions and also the messages and miracles of Garabandal.

## Marian apparitions

Marian apparitions are not a new or minor cause of Christian pilgrimages through history. Most of these extraordinary events are similar to each other but they also display differences. Apparitions and pilgrimages have increased since medieval times (Nolan & Nolan 1989: 85). Exploring the increasing interest in Marian apparitions, Michael P. Carroll claims that 'nothing so testifies to Mary's importance as the fact that she intervenes directly in the affairs of this earth by appearing face to face with ordinary Catholics' (Carroll 1986: 115). Carroll mentions the conclusion drawn by Karl Rahner that during the Middle Ages appearances of saints, prelates and Jesus were also common but in modern times Marian apparitions have escalated. These phenomena began in the middle of the nineteenth century as we know them in, for example, La Salette and Lourdes, France. Of the apparitions that have occurred in the twentieth century, we should mention those in Fatima, Portugal. These places have attracted a lot of pilgrims, since appearances are said to have taken place there. The interest, mainly from the Catholic Church and its members, has not ceased. These sacred places or shrines continue to attract a lot of pilgrims every year.

Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan (1989) who discuss modern Christian pilgrimages since 1780 confirm that the most famous modern-age shrines are the church-approved sites in such places. They note that Marian sites not necessarily approved by the Church that nowadays 'draw pilgrims on an international, and sometimes intercontinental basis, are found in such widely scattered places as Garabandal, Spain; Kerizinen in Brittany, France; Heroldsbach and Pfaffenhofen in south west Germany; and San Damiano near Piacenza, Italy' (Nolan & Nolan 1989: 102). They suggest that the interest in such sites will increase and that a few of them will gain full approval from future bishops since they are 'similar in type to the accepted Marian apparitional shrines of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (Nolan & Nolan 1989: 102). It is established practise that decisions concerning Marian apparitions are in the hands of local bishops.

Another contemporary site known for its Marian apparitions is Medjugorje in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 6 June 2009, the local bishop Peric in Mostar made public a letter about Medjugorje that shows an example of the Catholic Church's view upon unapproved pilgrim sites: 'Brothers and sisters, let us not act as if these 'apparitions' were recognized and worthy of faith. . .' (Medjugorje09). Bishop Peric continued: 'If, as Catholics, devoted sons and daughters of the church, we want to live according to the norms and the teach-

ing of the church, glorifying the Holy Trinity, venerating Blessed Mary. . . and professing all the church has established in the creed, we do not turn to certain alternative ‘apparitions’ or ‘messages’ to which the church has not attributed any supernatural character’ (Medjugorje09). To begin with, this was also a central question in Garabandal: whether the visions seen by four young girls had a supernatural origin or not (Serre & Caux 2001: 59 ff.). As we can see from Medjugorje, the matter of defining apparitions in categories such as supernatural or not, is still important for the Church today. Another word used is authentic, which here seems to have a similar meaning as supernatural. Scientists would prefer not to use these categorizations. Many kinds of physical examinations were also performed by physicians.

Regardless of this, people have claimed that the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, has appeared at the above mentioned places under names such as Our Lady of La Salette, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima or, as in Garabandal, Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Serre & Caux 2001: 41). The use of Mount Carmel uniquely connects the apparitions with Jewishness and Israel. During the apparitions, the Virgin has been talking directly to a small number of people, mainly young people or children. She has thus been talking to the entire world to make it change and to do penance. The Virgin has been giving prophecies about a future to come, a conditional future dependent upon the world changing its attitude towards God. In Garabandal the visionaries once sang a song while in ecstasy containing the lyrics ‘The Virgin has warned us: With this time, it makes three’ (Serre & Caux 2001: 128) apparently referring to Lourdes and Fatima, the two major Marian shrines and also marking Garabandal’s importance. The major apparitional shrines are known because of common secrets about the future and perhaps supernatural miracles and healings of the sick. We may ask ourselves how we are to handle extraordinary happenings that even scientists have regarded as possible interventions of a supernatural character. For example in Fatima in 1917, the so-called ‘miracle of the sun’ was witnessed by many thousands of people. The secrets of Fatima are well known, but partly because of the unwillingness of church authorities to fully release their contents. Here we have two elements, secrets and miracles, which entice many pilgrims to make the journey to shrines such as those mentioned here.

## Motivations for pilgrimages to Garabandal

Garabandal is such a site or place, but also special since its secrets and miracle are in the future. The main reasons for making a pilgrimage to Garabandal seems to be: an interest in the apparitional events of the past; the apocalyptic information given to the visionaries about the end of time, but not the end of the world; the two special messages given to the world; expectations of healing; prophecies about future events that have been prophesied to happen in the near future, such as a warning and a miracle. Victor Turner reminds us that pilgrimages are often undertaken for the purpose of salvation, for the good of the soul, and that a pilgrimage has in a way replaced initiation rituals (Turner 1974: 65). The apparitions in Garabandal talk about a worldwide warning or purification but perhaps, above all, about a coming miracle, greater than any miracle ever performed by God before. These things are described in great detail and even with dates. This information is said to come from the vision of the Virgin Mary through four child visionaries.

There is much literature and research on approved Marian shrines. However, Garabandal is only a footnote, if mentioned at all, in most of the contemporary books about Marian pilgrimages. The literature about Garabandal mainly comes from its promoters. The well-known pilgrim route El Camino Frances, the nearby pilgrimage from France to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain, does not pass through Garabandal. A case study of this pilgrim route is 'Ancient and Modern Pilgrimage: El Camino Frances' by Nigel D. Morpeth in *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Management. An International Perspective* (2007). The same book also includes Ruth Blackwell's article 'Motivations for Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage, Festivals and Events'. Both authors define religious tourism, and one difference in category that Blackwell points out, referring to Lefebvre, is that between pilgrimage sites and shrine sites. A shrine normally has a relic or image to venerate. The pilgrim site is a place where a miracle has occurred (Blackwell 2007: 35–47). According to this, a pilgrimage to Garabandal is not yet a complete pilgrimage since it lacks such elements as a relic or a miracle that has occurred. There was actually what was called 'The little miracle' (Serre & Caux 2001: 142). But we could say that the obvious qualifications for pilgrimages to Garabandal are still very limited. A pilgrimage usually also presents a kind of struggle. The site is usually hard to reach. Garabandal, some 50 kilometres up in the Cantabrian Mountains, does offer this. It is in several ways an ideal small pilgrimage site, almost designed for the purpose, with special difficulties adherent to it, including access to its location up in the mountains. To reach the hill site with its pine grove, the last

100 metres have to be made by foot on a rocky trail. Blackwell speaks about process theories of motivation for pilgrimages, about effort and expectation (Blackwell 2007: 42 f.). Reaching Garabandal is made up of these characteristics.

The high seasons for pilgrimages to shrines in honour of Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary are April and September (Nolan & Nolan 1989: 63). The most important months to make the journey to Garabandal are March to May and especially around Easter and in the middle of April. An organized pilgrimage group from the United States has made an annual visit to Garabandal in April for about thirty years, organized by Maria Saraco, an eyewitness from the 1960s. Nowadays, the Internet plays an important role for people not able to visit a site like Garabandal. Travel via the web demands no effort, painful good-byes or long voyages, being 'a series of actualizations of temporally limited virtual sites. . .' (Apolito 2005: 226 f.). As we will see further on, the expectation of a future miracle is very central for pilgrimages to Garabandal. It is possible to get information by email before the date of this future miracle through the website of Joey Lomangino, a key witness of the events of the 1960s. Lomangino declares how useful online technology is in spreading the message and in giving information to future pilgrims who prepare to visit Garabandal on the day of the miracle:

You can help in the promotion of the message around the world. Use of this new technology ensures that the story of Garabandal reaches new places and new generations before the prophesied events occur. Please refer this website to your friends, family, church groups, religious organizations and apostolates via chat room and email. If this new technology passes you by, promote the website to your children and grandchildren. (Garabandal US.)

Reports of healing are also an important part of the Garabandal events and websites (e.g., Our Lady CA) and therefore also for pilgrimages. Otherwise life in the small village could be described as calm, with elderly villagers viewing the small number of pilgrims, villagers that were eyewitnesses to the events in the 1960s. Many of them were interviewed in *Garabandal. The Village Speaks* (1981) by Ramon Pérez.

## Marian apparitions in Garabandal

The apparitions in Garabandal occurred in the years 1961–5. Four girls, of around 12 years old were picking or stealing apples. Like the first persons mentioned in the Bible they felt bad after stealing the apples. Suddenly they heard thunder and an angel appeared before them. Later on the vision of the Virgin Mary would appear to have conversations with them. The girls very much loved meeting her. This is how the visionary Conchita Gonzalez describes the Virgin Mary:

### **The Virgin Mary**

The Virgin comes in a white robe, a blue mantle, and a crown of little golden stars. The feet are not seen; the hands are open and there is a scapular on the right one: the scapular is brown. Her hair is long, a dark chestnut brown colour, wavy, and parted in the middle; the face is somewhat elongated; the nose is also somewhat long, and fine; the mouth, very beautiful with slightly full lips. The colour of her face is tan, but much lighter than that of the Angel, different. The voice is very beautiful, very unusual. I don't know how to explain it. There is no other woman who resembles the Virgin, either in the voice, or in anything. (Conchita's Diary: Chapter 3.)

The children entered into ecstatic states some two thousand times and every day or night in 1962. Inhabitants in Garabandal could look out of their windows any day or night and get to see one or more of the visionaries following the vision of the Virgin Mary. This often happened during the night and the young visionaries went out from their homes in ecstasy, usually accompanied by their mother or another family member. This happened in summer as well as during snowstorms. It was not really possible to stop the children from following the vision. Their bodies were insensitive to contact. The visionaries' faces were shining with an interior beauty. Usually the visionaries spoke of the communications with the Virgin formally and with seriousness but also in a typically childish way:

The Virgin has told us: The world continues the same. . . That it has not changed at all. FEW WILL SEE GOD. They are so few that it causes The Virgin much sorrow. What a pity that it does not change. . . The cup is filling up. How sad The Virgin was although She didn't let us see it because She loves us so much and She suffers alone. She is so good! Be

good everyone so that The Virgin will be happy. . . . (Garabandal: June 23, 1962.)

Two or three men could not lift up the visionaries but they could easily lift up each other to get closer to the vision of the Virgin. Even if they could spend three or four hours during the night following and communicating with the Virgin, they were never ill and they had always recovered in the morning and were ready to go to school. The numerous visits by the Virgin to the young girls had different purposes. Among the most unique are two messages given to the world to repent and to turn towards God. At shrines such as Lourdes or Fatima the Virgin never specifically talked about giving messages (Serre & Caux 2001: 36). The first message of Garabandal had already been revealed by an angel, on 24 June 1961. About two weeks later, on 4 July, the Virgin taught the children the message and told them it was not to be made public until 18 October the same year:

**First message. October 18, 1961**

We must make many sacrifices, perform much penance, and visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently. But first, we must be very good. If we do not, a chastisement will befall us. The cup is already filling up, and if we do not change, a very great chastisement will come upon us. (Serre & Caux 2001: 108.)

According to Father Ramón María Andreu, who witnessed several ecstasies, there were around five thousand people in the village that day in October (Conchita's Diary: Chapter 12). On the same day an ecstasy followed the announcement of the message. The Virgin then told Conchita Gonzalez that a great miracle certainly would come. At that time the visionary did not know what it would consist of, or when it would come. From November to January further explanations were given to her about the future miracle (Serre & Caux 2001: 158ff). In a letter of 28 May 1965 to Joey Lomangino she explained why the miracle would come: There will first be a warning sent worldwide from heaven to induce humanity to change towards God and to prepare for the great miracle. If the world still does not change a chastisement will fall upon mankind, the Virgin told Conchita Gonzalez. The Virgin also explained that the world believes in heaven and hell, but that people do not think they have to go to the one or the other. That humanity thinks only of the present life (Serre & Caux 2001: 186). Also the second and last of the messages was foretold by Conchita Gonzalez and this time as much as six months earlier.



Conchita Gonzalez receiving the final message of Garabandal on 18 June 1965. Photo [www.garabandalarchives.com](http://www.garabandalarchives.com).

The Virgin revealed to her on 8 December 1964, that she would be given a second message for the world on 18 June 1965. During that spring, people's expectations for this message increased to a very high level. Several thousands of people were again present to witness the receiving and announcing of the message (Serre & Caux 2001: 188).

**Second message. June 18, 1965**

As my Message of October 18 has not been complied with and has not been made known to the world, I am advising you that this is the last one. Before the cup was filling up. Now it is flowing over. Many

priests, bishops and cardinals are on the road to perdition and are taking many more souls with them. Less and less importance is being given to the Eucharist. You should turn the wrath of God away from yourselves by your efforts. If you ask His forgiveness with sincere hearts, He will pardon you. I, your mother, through the intercession of Saint Michael the Archangel, ask you to amend your lives. You are now receiving the last warnings. I love you very much and do not want your condemnation. Pray to us with sincerity and we will grant your requests. You should make more sacrifices. Think about the passion of Jesus. (Serre & Caux 2001: 192.)



The messages and prophecies of Garabandal can be summarised as follows: (1) There are two unique and specific messages for converting the whole world. (2) It foretells the end of times but not the end of the world. The end of times has been interpreted as it happened with the end of the Roman Empire and is said to arrive after the late or present Pope. (3) It foretells a worldwide warning and a miracle with a certain date. If the world still does not change toward God a chastisement will be sent over the world. This chastisement is conditional.

We must finally mention that Church authorities have done only brief examinations of the events in Garabandal. The village priest until November 1965, Father Valentin Marichalar, was never interrogated, neither by the bishop nor by the special Commission (Pérez 1981: 71). Nevertheless, a Decree issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 15 November 1966 and in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council granted a new responsible freedom in the field of apparitions, revelations, visions and prophecies (Serre & Caux 2001: 210). In order to calm things down, Bishop Puchol Montis of the Santander diocese in March 1967 made public a denial in which the four visionaries declared that there had not been any apparitions; there were no messages; all the events had natural explanations and had started as innocent children's games (Pérez 1981: 64f). However, the visionaries had been under much pressure from church authorities during long interviews to agree upon this. Subsequently, the visionaries have withdrawn their denials and have lived lives dedicated to the Catholic faith with devotion to the Virgin Mary. They remember the apparitions as dreams since they were then in ecstasy. And there is one circumstance that they have never denied and that is the feeling of joy they experienced before entering into ecstasy. Before the ecstasies they experienced three interior summons or mystical calls, *llamadas*:

A feeling of joy accompanies the first call. One or two hours later, the delight felt by the visionaries signalled the second call. 'As if they had been guided,' they would set out towards the site where the ecstasy was to take place. The third 'llamada' gave them yet a more intense joy, which would increase until they would effectively fall into ecstasy a few minutes later. (Serre & Caux 2001: 72.)

In June 1970, Bishop José Cirarda Lachiondo of Santander published a long document, said to have been sent to all bishops of the whole church. He reminds the recipients that the messages from Garabandal do not contain any-



Looking at the vision of the Virgin Mary, Conchita Gonzalez is offering her crucifix to be kissed. Photo [www.garabandalarchives.com](http://www.garabandalarchives.com).

thing contrary to the teaching of the Church on faith and morals but that the phenomena all have a natural explanation and that pilgrimages and exercises there are discouraged (Pérez 1981: 65 ff.). The Bishop (1971–91) Juan Del Val Gallo, member of an investigating Special Commission in 1961, requested that the ‘Garabandal dossier’ should be officially reopened, but Rome refused since no new events had occurred. He later lifted the interdiction upon priests, forbidding them to go up to Garabandal (Serre & Caux 2001: 218 f.). The church’s unofficial position on Garabandal is ‘*Non-constat de supernaturalitate*. . . It is not certain that the events are of supernatural origin, or the supernatural origin has not been established. . .?’ (Garabandal Clarification), which is to say that the events are still open to the possibility of recognition as being authentic. Garabandal has not yet been approved by the Catholic Church, but neither has it been condemned. The current Bishop of Santander, Archbishop Vincente Zamora, as well as the Catholic Church, holds the position of ‘wait and see’ upon any new information and for the date of the miracle to arrive.

Scientists such as prominent doctors and psychiatrists examined the four visionaries and found them in very good condition during or after the ecstasies: ‘Pinching, burns, intense light: so many sensory stimulants producing no effect’ (Serre & Caux 2001: 61). After years of observation, a child specialist certified that the girls had always been completely normal and that the ecstasies did not fall under any known physiological phenomenon (Garabandal Science). A Special Commission was set up by the bishop to investigate the events. The members, three priests and two physicians, visited the village three times during the years. The visionaries share their opinion about their examiners: ‘The Commission has come up here very few times; never did it bother with us; they interrogated only certain persons in the village chosen among those who did not believe in the apparitions’ (Pérez 1981: 71). Doctor

Luis Moralès, psychiatrist and head of the commission, commented on the phenomena: ‘This is in no way supernatural. . .it is a psychogenic reaction to the situation. . .vulgar hysterical phenomena. . .’ (Serre & Caux 2001: 59 ff.). Dr Moralès assured that the ecstasies would cease within the same day. Ten minutes later the visionaries entered into ecstasy but Dr Moralès had already left the place (Pérez 1981: 70). Twenty years later he reversed his position and publicly defended the authenticity of the apparitions. Science has so far been unable to explain the events, the over two thousand apparitions which occurred in San Sebastián de Garabandal in 1961–5.

### The future miracle

The term miracle (Lat. *mirari*) is usually used about a phenomenon that has already occurred in the past. A miracle is regarded as an extraordinary happening that has unexpectedly surprised unknowing people. Niels Christian Hvidt talks about three aspects in the term miracle: its nature, its psychology and its symbolism. Hvidt refers to Thomas Aquinas when defining a miracle as something above the order of nature or natural law. In a Christian context God himself is performing this event. The psychological effect on witnesses of a miracle is great. Thirdly, the symbolic effect of a miracle is important for the interpretation. A miracle has usually been seen as a word or act of God to help people know more about God and salvation (Hvidt 2003: 14 f.). On the other hand, human beings have as far as we know always been hoping or praying for divine intervention. In the case of the events in Garabandal, it could be seen as if such a prayer was partially answered. The inhabitants of the isolated village have been praying the Catholic rosary prayer together in the small village church every night since time immemorial, or at least over the last five hundred years (Serre & Caux 2001: 15). This in order to have the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, to protect them through the assistance of her son. In the early 1960s things took a dramatic turn when the vision of the Virgin Mary appeared to the four girls in Garabandal. And on 18 October 1961, after giving the first message, the Virgin promised that her son Jesus in the future would perform a miracle in Garabandal, so the world would believe (Serre & Caux 2001: 109). These are the words of the visionary Conchita Gonzalez:

The Virgin told only me about the miracle. She forbade me to say what it will consist of. I cannot reveal the date either until eight days beforehand. What I am allowed to say is that it will coincide with an event in the

church, and with the feast of a saint who is a martyr of the Holy Eucharist; it will be at half-past eight on a Thursday evening; it will be visible to everybody in the village and on the surrounding mountainsides; the sick who are present will be cured and the incredulous will believe. It will be the greatest miracle that Jesus has worked for the world. There will not remain the slightest doubt that it comes from God and is for the good of mankind. In the pine grove, a sign of the miracle will be left forever. It will be possible to film and televise it. (Sanchez-Ventura y Pascual 2000: 167.)

This summons up one reason for pilgrimages to Garabandal. But there had already been ‘The little miracle’. Three weeks in advance Conchita Gonzalez announced the mystical Communion, a host given by an angel to appear on her tongue. This happened on 18 July 1962 (Serre & Caux 2001: 138 f.). The great miracle is to become the greatest miracle God has ever performed and lead Christians back to unity. It will take place in Garabandal. The date will be announced by Conchita Gonzalez eight days in advance so as many people as possible can travel there. As Conchita Gonzalez simply declares in an interview with Auxiliary Bishop Francisco Garmendia of New York: ‘Because whatever the Virgin says happens just as she says it’ (Garabandal Journal). In the interview she also says:

I would like to add, however, with reference to Rome, that some priests or people are putting too much pressure on the Church to approve Garabandal. I believe it would be better that this be left in the hands of God. Let them speak about and spread the Message of the Virgin, but leave the rest in the hands of God. . . .Before, when I was so concerned about whether Rome would believe me or not, the Lord Himself told me: ‘Don’t worry about being believed, especially in Rome. I will do everything.’ I would like to tell this to all those who want the Bishop and Rome to hurry ahead in this matter. (Garabandal Journal.)

One interesting detail is that a Catholic priest became involved in seeing the vision of the Virgin Mary and the future miracle. Father Luis María Andreu, a Jesuit Doctor in Theology and Professor of Theology in Oña, Burgos, was visiting Garabandal and celebrated mass in the village church on 8 August 1961. That evening the girls fell into ecstasy inside the church. Father Andreu followed their ecstatic walk up to the pines and suddenly he fell in ecstasy. He shouted ‘Milagro!’ (Miracle) four times: ‘His eyes fixed on heaven, he was granted to see the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel, and also, by anticipation,

the future great Miracle which is to take place at San Sebastián de Garabandal' (Serre & Caux 2001: 85). The visionaries had seen him during their ecstasy. Father Andreu died the same night after having reported what he had experienced earlier:

I am filled with joy! What a favour the Blessed Virgin has granted me! How lucky we are to have such a Mother in heaven! We must not be afraid of the supernatural. The children have taught us how to speak to the Blessed Virgin. For me, there can be no doubt! Why did the Blessed Virgin choose us, yes, us? Today is the happiest day of my life! (Serre & Caux 2001: 86)

## Conclusion

San Sebastián de Garabandal is a pilgrimage site that still awaits its pilgrims. The village and its surroundings offer a traditional site for pilgrims, but the main elements for a traditional pilgrimage are not yet completed. Such elements are a relic, an image to venerate, or a miracle. Therefore neither the Catholic Church, nor scientists, have approved the apparitions in Garabandal, although they have never been condemned, either. There are no contradictions to the Church's traditional teachings or morals. Today the main motivation for pilgrimages to Garabandal is their interest in the past events as well as an expectation of the foretold future events. One of the visionaries, Conchita Gonzalez, has in mysterious ways been prepared for announcing a future miracle. Before having ecstasies she and the other visionaries experienced three interior calls of joy. Three weeks in advance she announced and later experienced 'The little miracle'. Six months in advance she announced and later received the second message of Garabandal. For almost fifty years Conchita Gonzalez from Garabandal has been facing her biggest challenge: to announce 'The great miracle'. The visionary knows the date and will announce it eight days in advance. Huge expectations, with unique Jewish overtones, are connected to this event that will motivate many pilgrims to make the journey to the mountains of northern Spain. The pilgrims will go with journalists, television teams and scientists. If or when this event will take place the idyllic village of Garabandal will certainly become a major shrine in Christianity.

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