

1 Introduction: Local Identity and Transnational Cults

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Religious Tourism, between Local Identity and the International Dimension¹

Before it became a political entity, Europe had long been a place where the movement of pilgrims and merchants made the knowledge of different languages and cultures possible. This was especially true in the case of the fairs held to celebrate the festivals associated with holy sites.

Pilgrimage, in its traditional sense, and in historic references, is a journey, often long and complex, which is performed out of devotion – a spiritual quest for the fulfilment of a votive. It is a necessary sacrifice that is made in order to arrive at a 'holy' place. This perspective renders the process of secularization witnessed today even more interesting, as it has an effect on all religious phenomena, and thus also the sense of what it means to undertake a pilgrimage.

The latest figures released by the United Nations World Trade Organization (UNWTO) (2011) estimate that annually there are 330 million travellers to places of worship, of which there are 40 million in Italy alone. About half of this total can be defined as pilgrims in the strictest sense. Travel to places of worship, from the more established to the more recent pilgrimages, some of which have yet to be approved by the

appropriate Church, appears to have reclaimed its position among the destinations available to the urban traveller, in the search for old and new forms of spirituality. This demonstrates how religious dynamics can surprise even academics, who might have expected to observe aspects of increasing secularization of society, more so than new forms of religiosity, which have, to varying extents, been codified by the Church (such as Medjugorje, or other sites associated with Marian apparitions).

There has been a long tradition of pilgrimage studies in Italy, with the aim of investigating the diverse expressions of popular religiosity, in a country where the Catholic culture has profoundly influenced the manner of worship. This has historically been expressed in terms of conflict, at times implicit, at times more explicit, between official forms of worship and expressions of popular Catholicism (Lombardi Satriani, 2000; Buttitta, 2002), also in relation to Marian apparitions (Apolito, 1990; 2002) and the study of miracles (Gallini, 1998). Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) directives (1997 and 2003), the devotional sphere has been augmented with the study of tangible and intangible heritage (objects, festivals and rituals). Votive aspects have been included as part of valorization

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and renewal projects, with the aim of capitalizing on them and the development of a territorial brand that promotes local resources, such as the environment, landscape, food and wine production, and religious aspects (Mariotti, 2013; Ransio and Borriello, 2014). This also occurs in a critical sense, taking into account the political and institutional dimensions (Palumbo, 2003).

The political dimension and local identity are particularly intertwined with the concept of pilgrimage, as they imprint the identity of a territory, and qualify and define it, not only by supporting and directing the development of the local economy and tourism, but also through encouraging community and aggregative social practices.

In recent decades, reflections on religious tourism, in particular in English (after the study by Turner and Turner in 1978), have developed following a multidisciplinary approach, involving anthropology, geography, sociology and history, with interesting theoretical developments. It must be said, however, that scant attention has been paid to studies in French and Italian, as noted by Albera (Albera and Blanchard, 2015).

It appears, for some authors, that pilgrimage has become a form of criticism of the urban and occupational lifestyle, interpreted as time dedicated to travel, naturalistic aspects and the personalization of faith. The debate, in recent decades, has centred on the ambiguous and polyvalent nexus between pilgrimage and religious tourism, often combining the two aspects, or observing the prevalence of touristic aspects over the religious. Pilgrimage has become a plural and polysemic context, in which social and private practices, public and political discourse and marketing, and consumer dynamics are brought together, involving multiple and contradictory viewpoints, such as ethnicity, local identity, transnational dynamics and inter-religious relations (Albera and Blanchard, 2015, pp. 7–8).

MacCannell (1973) sees travel for tourism as a kind of pilgrimage, a search for an authentic existence; through a semiotic reading he reflects on the relationship between social imagination, intellectual construction and the desire for authenticity. Tourism, from his perspective, is a type of secular religion based on the search for the self, beyond the context of the everyday. It has a ritualistic dimension, moving towards another place, associated with the multiform productions of the social imaginary. In this sense he

considers tourism to be a 'search for authenticity', beyond the heavily polluted urban context, in a perspective of self-realization. Simonicca, who has often addressed the approach of MacCannell in his works, and appears to be in agreement, believes that the search for motivation and direction is at the core of tourism-related behaviour, almost as if this could indicate different forms of moral integration, in contrast with the alienation of urban life: tourism produces objects, and transforms them to the extent that they become inauthentic, representing an ethnography of modernity (Simonicca, 2011, pp. 72–74). While the theoretical perspectives offered by MacCannell are stimulating, in particular the aspects critical of contemporary society, it would be misleading to think of tourism as a religion, above all because of the different motivations and practices associated with the two activities. Religion can be modified, transformed into a ritual and communicative dimension, in hierarchical or genre forms, and even secularized, but the search for authenticity seems more influenced by urban life than by religion. Religion involves worship, rituals, ceremonies and mediators of the sacred; the expressive search for subjectivity in certain forms of mysticism, which is sometimes considered heretical or criticized by religious institutions. Those who undertake a pilgrimage cannot be an 'observer' in the sense of adherence to institutional and theological forms, and while they can express this path in subjective and personalized forms, they are seeking a sacred dimension, not authenticity. Nevertheless, it is possible to consider the phenomenon as a journey to another place, where this other place offers the opportunity to reach a higher level of consciousness than the context of origin.

Cohen (1992) describes tourism as an experience, in terms of the relationship between the subject and otherness, between the centre and elsewhere, and between the authentic and false, in relation to the awareness of the traveller. In this sense, there are different levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with regard to the place of arrival, which are associated with different levels of awareness. He differentiates those heading to a religious centre from those who travel for art tourism, even though religious sanctuaries are often also museums, and the two roles appear to have become blurred, to the extent that the tourist sees the religious sites from a historical-artistic point of view. Eade and Sallnow consider

it essential to define the specificity of individual pilgrimages and the diverse historical perspectives that are contextual to the sites, and maintain that these sites have become the subject of diverse interests, an 'arena of competitive discourse' between the various social actors, be they civic, religious or economic authorities (1991, pp. 5). Gastrell and Reid (2002), Albera and Eade (2015), and Albera and Blanchard (2015) affirm that economic processes are part of the same socio-cultural space, and that the differences depend on perceptions and expectations at the local level; therefore, the theoretical perspective cannot be generalized without taking the ethnographic aspect into account.

It appears that the debate tends to identify pilgrims with tourists, although with some degree of nuance, seeing in the former the dimension of the consumption of the sacred, a form of consumption understood in relation to both the place of worship and visits to cities of art. Collins-Kreiner has underlined the difference between the perspective of the religious organization, which also sees the pilgrim as a tourist-consumer, and the contrasting point of view of the traveller; in her view, religious motivation should be distinguished from its economic-tourist counterpart (2010).

One of the cardinal concepts is that of *heritage*, a concept that seeks to combine the different expressions of the traditions associated with a site, in its overall dimension, blending together nature and culture, landscape and works of art, forms of human activity and respect for the environment. In this sense, modernity does not develop based on new forms of industrialization, but the 'recovery' of crafts activities, historical traditions and landscape protection. The site and its history are identified as elements in commodification and economic and tourism activities. In this new role, tourism is strongly linked to *terroir*, in terms of the natural environment, food and wine production, and the historical and artistic dimension. In this new meaning, tourism is directly tied to sites, and the repository of significance associated with the site, its saint. The historical context serves tourism, and tourism takes on religious, artistic, naturalistic and ecological aspects.

At least four viewpoints are involved in the 'city-sanctuary system': that of the institutions and their proposal for the 're-evangelization' of Catholics, who today have a very superficial

popular knowledge of Christianity; that of economic organizations that target the pilgrim-tourist as a supporter of local businesses (restaurants, hotels and shops); that of local authorities, who aim to promote a form of tourism that also involves locations associated with art, and the promotion of local food and wine; and, finally, that of the pilgrims, who are mainly motivated by the religious element, but are inevitably immersed in a consumer mechanism related to the experience of the journey itself. In the dimension of popular religiosity, such travellers are not only pilgrims hoping for answers to their problems, but also consumers of the sacred and souvenirs, such as in the case of Lourdes (Reader, 2014).

It appears that religious organizations, while aware that pilgrims are 'consumers' of the sacred, even in the economic sense, concentrate on the task of religious education, with regard to the masses of pilgrims and travellers, who are increasingly secularized, and appear more attracted by a personal dimension than the official dimension the institutions promote and support.

The development of religious/environmental/cultural tourism is a recent development, the result of the rediscovery of nature trails and renewed attention to the landscape, the value of which is finally being recognized, as is the risk caused by urban sprawl. This is a new postmodern consciousness, which was quite alien to pilgrims until a few decades ago. In the past, they travelled to 'touch the sacred', and paid little or no attention to the landscape. Even in sanctuaries located in mountainous and scenic areas this aspect was somewhat taken for granted, and not perceived as having added value because the value was attributed to the Virgin Mary or patron saint.

In religious tourism, the sacred seems less present, at the expense of the cultural and secular, and if the tourist has an emotional experience it will be when they encounter a work of art or a panoramic view. The secular tourist sees art and nature as exceptional, while the pilgrim associates the exceptional with the sacred.

In highlighting specific local features, they are presented as 'special' and 'unique' icons, and equated with the sanctity of the site and the saint, as if they were signs of the extended power of the saint. In this syncretism, food and wine, the landscape and places of worship are combined as part of the exceptional local features that establish the identity of the location; therefore, generating its own *brand* can mean increasing

the power of the site, in terms of both the local economy and religious tourism.

It is interesting to observe how new forms of religious tourism associate works of art with holy sites, and offer nature trails associated with the saints. This is the case of the Way of St Francis in Assisi. Since 1994 the Way of St Francis has been recognized by the Council of Europe as a cultural route, much like the *Camino de Compostella*. In this sense, the Region of Umbria promotes the paths of St Francis, the saint known throughout the world, in order to encourage visitors to travel to certain landscapes and cultural sites in Umbria. The association with the best-known Italian saint and his hymns to nature (Sister Moon, Brother Sun) is clear. While this has helped make the Way of St Francis a route of naturalistic pilgrimage, Assisi is also associated with Giotto, culture and landscape.

Certainly, compared to the past, more attention is paid to the political and economic context, in which various interests and diverse contemporary perspectives collide: the use of the media, aspects of tourism related to the journey, the dynamics of commercialization, the requirements of local identity and the widespread phenomenon of secularization. These are certainly concepts worthy of consideration, as they appear to have moved the focus of pilgrimage from a purely religious experience to an art tourism experience, which disregards a particularly widespread permanent 'sacred need', even in Catholic Europe.

The Structure of the Book

This volume collects together a selection of papers from the XXVIII Colloque Euretno du Conseil d'Europe, the European network of Francophone anthropologists, which was held in Perugia and Assisi from 12–14 September 2014, with the title 'Le tourisme religieux en Europe'. The aim is to offer an overview, albeit partial, of the different forms taken on by pilgrimage and religious tourism today, as a means to interpret the complexity of the religious practices that bring together institutional dynamics, votive practices, and migration and intercultural dimensions in differentiated contexts. The organization of the book serves to weave a common

thread between practices that are traditional, to various extents, in terms of local and transnational dimensions, and offer a variety of interpretive keys to this complex phenomenon, from religious, historical, political and touristic perspectives, bringing together the work of academics from many geographical areas.

Blending theoretical constructs with solid investigative research, the first part of the book: 'From Local to International, the Development of Devotion', provides a selection of chapters that interrogate the development of devotional practices and cults. While the cases are essentially local in nature, they clearly illustrate the origins and evolution of ritualistic practices, presenting a range of perspectives on this human activity, some being quite ancient, others being relatively new in origin. Chapter 1, by Giacalone and Griffin contextualizes the book with a reflection on pilgrimage studies and their evolution in European literature. Following this, the chapter presents an overview of the book, outlining the overall structure and detailing the contributions of the various authors.

Chapter 2 by Spitilli analyses the cult of the Madonna del Alno di Canzano, based in a rural town in the province of Teramo, Abruzzo (Italy). The mediators of this supernatural encounter were oxen, joined in the following days by a horse, which knelt in the presence of the Virgin. The history of this local cult reveals the complexity of the symbolic procedures and social strategies that govern the progressive definition of devotional practices, translating into ritual language the succession of political struggles and power relations between the urban elites, the local church and the rural population, the continuity between liturgical and folk rituals, and the semantic logic that organizes the universe.

The objective of religious tourism involves not only sites associated with faith, but also visits to historical and cultural sites, environments and landscapes. The contribution by Paola de Salvo (Chapter 3) reflects on new forms of religious tourism, at both the theoretical and scientific levels, in examining the Way of St Francis, which, through the involvement of political and religious authorities, was awarded the 'pilgrim's licence'. In 2011 a new entrepreneurial initiative was created, the 'Umbria and Francesco's Ways' consortium, co-financed by the Region of Umbria (Italy). It consists of enterprises offering

hospitality and dining services located along the entire route, whose activity is dedicated exclusively to the enhancement, promotion and marketing of the Way of St Francis. The pilgrim is awarded a certificate at the end of the official route: the *Testimonium Viae Francisci*. This is a religious travel document that accompanies each pilgrim along the path, and attests to their identity and intentions.

In Chapter 4, Bellio analyses how Calabria has witnessed an interesting phenomenon – the construction of new places of worship associated with forms of fortune telling that characterize the contemporary religious landscape. Pilgrimage and religious tourism are issues that can be investigated in light of the transformations that characterize the religious practices of southern Italy, where there are significant examples of the popularity of mystical figures leading to a process involving hospitality facilities being constructed to accommodate the thousands of faithful who characterize the perimeter of action.

In Chapter 5, Fournier analyses a number of local pilgrimages in Provence (France), where excesses and rivalry among the parishioners were evident, to the extent of violent combat, as they fought for the honour of serving the saint. The ritual battles have now become an instrument of tourism development, with religious and civil authorities finding ways to make use of this historical and ritualistic heritage.

Part 2, containing Chapters 6–11, presents an eclectic set of papers discussing various aspects of ‘Popular Pilgrimage Development’. In Chapter 6, Parbuono investigates the role played in the Chinese community by the Temple of the Buddhist Association of the Chinese community in Prato, which hosts a range of important festivals and welcomes pilgrims from other cities. This is both a social meeting place, and a place of ‘complementarity cultural worship’ with regard to the religious practices that the Chinese officiate during their journey to the monasteries in their country of origin.

The conflict between institutions and popular practices emerges in the cult of Saint Sarah in Saintes Maries de la Mer, in the Camargue (France), where the gypsy saint, who is not officially recognized by the Catholic Church, is the subject of strong devotion. This is particularly true during her feast, in June, which also serves

as a gathering for various Roma communities. In this case, the religious tourism attracts tourist-photographers, who search for a gypsy folklore dimension along the streets of the French city. The cult of Sarah, as described by Gaëlla Loiseau in Chapter 7, has also been exported by tourist-pilgrims to Brazil, and has become an element of Umbanda rituals, as a black saint of the marginalized.

Cruzzolin (Chapter 8) reflects on the worship of the Señor de los Milagros by Peruvian immigrants in Italy, and the related pilgrimages held in Perugia and Rome. His contribution is intended to illustrate the way in which the members of a specific diaspora, in this case the Peruvians, have been able to propose a counter-hegemonic discourse that redefines the boundary between visibility and invisibility in Italian society, giving rise to a discussion on the relationship between Catholicism and migration. Devotional images are the means by which Catholic Peruvian migrants can regain a sense of narrative, and the ability to articulate and relate their own experiences, thus, enabling a community dimension at the moment when a symbolic centre is established (represented by a venerated painting).

In Chapter 9, Guillaume writes about the cult of Saint Solvang, which is celebrated by Portuguese immigrants in France on Pentecost Monday. This festival has become a really important element of life for the Portuguese community, through which they display community membership via rituals and dance on French soil.

Lamothe, in Chapter 10 explores how travelling through Landes (France) offers a surprising connection between religion and sport. This manifests itself in road signs indicating the ‘Chapel of Our Lady of Rugby’ at Larrivière-Saint-Savin, the ‘Chapel of Our Lady of the *Course Landaise*’ in Bascons or the ‘Chapel of Our Lady of the Cyclists’ at Labastide-d’Armagnac. These chapels constitute authentic places of worship, dating from the mid-twentieth century, which represent a two-fold tribute to sports and athletes. They attract numerous visitors, in particular during the pilgrimage on Whit Monday, during which a tribute to departed athletes is held. The study attempts to understand what has enabled or favoured the creation of this unique syncretism, which allows the shirts of

rugby players and cyclists to be placed together with statues of the Blessed Virgin in religious shrines rich in sporting memory.

In Chapter 11, Julliard brings to light the transnational nature of the cult of St Nicholas of Bari (Italy), which attracts Catholic and Orthodox pilgrims (Italians and Slavs), due to the particular appeal of the saint, a native of Myra. The analysis highlights the perspective of a French 'foreign traveller' who analyses the cult through an external ethnographic vision of local dynamics.

The third element of the book, Part 3, provides a focus on Saint Rita. The worship of St Rita of Cascia, one of the most widespread Catholic icons of the twentieth century, extends not only across Europe and Latin America, but also into the Middle East (such as in Lebanon). Three chapters are presented that deal with various aspects of this saint's worship. The first of these contributions dealing with St Rita, by Inga Kuzma (Chapter 12), emphasizes the emergence of the cult of the saint in Poland, in Krakow in particular, where the post-communist era has seen the development, especially in Catholic areas, of new processional routes associated with transnational cults. In the second

chapter, her veneration is interpreted with reference to local perspectives: the relationship between the saint and the town of Cascia, with which she is identified. Giacalone in Chapter 13 continues with an analysis of the pilgrimage to Roccaporena, with a reflection on the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism. The analysis seeks to investigate the meaning of the relationship between pilgrims, the saint and local identity. The third offering by Kiely (Chapter 14) explores the evolution and anatomy of devotional practice among a predominantly female congregation, who attend a weekly novena mass in Dublin, Ireland, to seek favours and support from a saint who is simultaneously a figure from medieval Italy and an ordinary woman like them, who understands their ongoing practical worries.

Chapter 15 by Griffin and Giacalone presents some concluding comments, reflecting on the various challenges provided by the chapter authors, and drawing together some final thoughts. This is followed by Discussion Questions for each chapter. These are provided to foster discussion and reflection on the individual chapters, and encourage readers to engage with further study and investigation.

Note

¹ Liam Boyle provides English translation for the work of Fiorella Giacalone.

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