



Religiousness as tourist performances: A case study of Greek Orthodox pilgrimage



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to decipher ways of experiencing religiousness through tourist performances, intersecting textual approaches with the essential embodiment and materiality of the tourist world. Exploring the diversity of religious tourists' practices within the Greek Orthodox context, two dimensions underpinning religious tourist experience are highlighted: institutional performances and unconventional performances. Focussing on the embodied experience and drawing upon theories of performance, the paper critiques the interplays of body and place to re-conceptualise current understanding of the pilgrimage/tourism relationship. In doing so, the paper proposes that tourism and religion are not separate entities but linked through embodied notions of godliness sensed through touristic performances.

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Introduction

Historically, authors have reflected upon the relationship between religion and tourism as linked through the institution of pilgrimage (Vukonic, 1996), this being understood generally as a religiously motivated journey to a sacred place that has been sanctified by the present or past action of divinity (Coleman & Eade, 2004). Almost all religions encourage travel to religious sites (Cohen, 1998; Kaufman, 2005; Reader, 2014), some of which have become popular contemporary pilgrimage destinations, such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem or Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Such travel is more pronounced in some non-western societies where religion and politics are strongly interrelated (Albera & Eade, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, for example, church and state are based on the Islamic law; all Muslims are expected to perform the hajj to Makkah as part of the fifth pillar of Islam, this being supported by government investment in infrastructure to control and reduce effects of crowding (Henderson, 2011; Jafari & Scott, 2014). The universality and puissance of such social movements (Albera & Eade, 2015; Boissevain, 2017; Eade and Albera, 2017), even in post-marxist countries such as China (Bingenheimer, 2017), has triggered researchers to investigate them from a tourism perspective. Several studies discuss the 'theology of tourism' (Cohen, 1998); that is understanding travellers' behaviour based on their affiliation (Boissevain, 2017; Collins-Kreiner & Klot, 2000), motivation, attachment and visitation patterns (Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli, & Manuel-Navarrete, 2014; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006). Others focus on the phenomenological (Andriotis, 2009), or explore the

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authenticity in the pilgrim experience (Andriotis, 2011; Belhassen, Caton, & Steward, 2008), the human geographical patterns in sacred spaces (Bhardwaj, 1973; Gartell & Collins-Kreiner, 2006), the impacts on hosts (Terzidou, Styliadis, & Szivas, 2008), management of sacred sites (Olsen, 2012; Shackley, 2001) or representation of religious heritage (Bandyopadhyaya, Morais, & Chick, 2008).

Where researchers address issues of experience and in-depth understanding of the religious tourism phenomenon, they tend to juxtapose tourism and religion; these being considered separate entities within the framework of meaning, constituting culturally erected divisions (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Either comparisons are made between pilgrims and tourists based on their particular motivations and sociological functional perspectives (Boorstin, 1964; Nyaupane, Timothy, & Poudel, 2015; Smith, 1992), or they are linked based on mutual experiences in terms of existential and post-modern approaches highlighting spiritual elements (Eade & Albera, 2015; Gibson, 2005) that often propose the end of the sacred/secular binary. In particular, postmodern studies consider alternative forms of religious tourism; namely secular pilgrimages, such as dark tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Hyde & Harman, 2011), nature based tourism (Dunlap, 2006; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011), migration (Liebelt, 2010), literary tourism (Brown, 2016) and sport tourism (Gibson, 2005). These accumulate similar elements to religious journeys, such as feelings of *communitas* (Turner & Turner, 1978) that group members share. Such approaches allow scholars, such as Collins-Kreiner (2016) in her 'Lifecycle of Concepts', to assert that pilgrimage tourism in its traditional way has reached a stagnation point. Moreover, they limit research on religious tourism to providing typologies (Andriotis, 2009; Smith, 1992), categorizing tourists based on their motivations and experiences rather than extrapolating the complexities of a phenomenon that goes beyond strict categories (Olsen, 2017; Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

Departing from such notions, and accepting that tourism and religion co-exist in the pilgrimage experience (Timothy & Olsen, 2006), this paper aims to decipher ways of experiencing religiousness through tourist performances, intersecting textual approaches with the essential embodiment and materiality of the tourist world. Defining tourist performances as practices that occur away from home, it is argued that believers can enliven their institutionalised belief (religiousness); the trip providing the stage upon which believers can perform (Edensor, 2001). For example, while there are no specific references to tourism in the Bible, it can be inferred that a believer's behaviour and experience during leisure time could lead to a greater appreciation of God (Vukonic, 1996). More explicitly, the Qur'an often refers to travel as a means to contemplate the creation of God (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Attribution theory plays a key role within this respect as religious experience is any happening that an individual attributes at least in part to the action of supernatural forces (Proudfoot & Shaver, 1975). Through the process of sanctification (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005), believers as active performers may attribute godly intervention to activities other than the religious institutional ones, creating individualised spaces of religious experience. As part of an unfolding of cognitive and affective processes within the tourists experience (Scarles, 2010), God may be experienced through effects of the events to which people's body parts respond (Barsalou, Barbey, Simmons, & Santos, 2005) and in which they participate, like emotional states of happiness arising through helping others. While this resembles post-modern ways of belief (Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Dunlap, 2006; Gibson, 2005), individual spaces of religious tourism experience are created within the understanding of one's religious belief system. Thus, no matter how unusual the emotional or the physical sensations are, if the individual does not consciously connect them to godly intervention, then the individual has not had a religious experience.

The term pilgrimage is used throughout this paper. Acknowledging the terminological diversity in global landscapes and critiques of researchers that use the term as a given natural (Albera et al., 2017; Reader, 2017), it is considered that 'pilgrimage' preserves the holy essence and pinpoints the evenly sacred elements of tourism within. It therefore provides an antithesis to studies that use the term religious tourism as hybrid of two different phenomena (Timothy & Olsen, 2006) namely of the sacred religion and the secular tourism. In addition it is noted that although Hindu (Clayverolas, 2017) and Chinese traditions (Bingenheimer, 2017) have a rich vocabulary for travel to special sites, researchers commonly end up using the term pilgrimage as being the most dominant word. The paper therefore takes the position that 'pilgrimage' in its English use enables cross-cultural comparisons and remains a comfort to non-English scholars as it entails both the elements of mobility and sacredness; 'pellerin' being the one who makes a journey to a place of worship (Albera et al., 2017).

The contribution of this paper, therefore, lies in understanding religiousness not only through its institutionalised performances, but also through individual, unconventional performances embodied in tourist dimensions, thereby reconceptualising the pilgrimage/tourism relationship. Religion is not only a semiotic field of representation but also a theatre of enactment, performance and agency that entails spaces beyond the everyday sacred places (Edensor, 2001, 1998). In particular, influenced by scholars such Deleuze (1990), Crouch (2009), Edensor (2007), Cloke and Jones (2001), Thrift (2008) and Urry and Larsen (2011), the pilgrimage experience is considered to be much more complex. It is the result of a series of performances where movements intertwine with religious prescriptions, embodied spaces of production and consumption, inter-subjective interactions and material encounters in tourist spaces that bring religious tourists closer to God. The body is, thus, considered a medium through which people can expand their knowledge of the world and experience states of becoming (Barsalou et al., 2005; Crouch, Aronsson, & Wahlström, 2001) through doing (Cloke & Jones, 2001; Ingold, 1995). Pilgrimages should therefore be looked at from an emic perspective; exploring the understanding of religion, sacred and tourism through the investigation of identity, material religion and landscape from the pilgrims' perspectives.

Focusing on the specific tensions between fixity and fluidity within the context of pilgrimage, firstly, the paper establishes a theoretical framework reconceptualising the pilgrimage/tourism relationship. Within this institutionalised performances and the ways they organise and influence peoples' experiences are critiqued and the subjectivity in religious performances and expressions, namely unconventional performances, embraced. Next, the context of two pilgrimages to the island of Tinos

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