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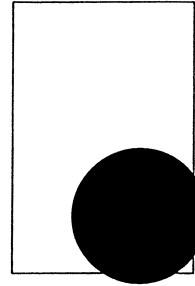
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# Do you believe in pilgrimage?

*Communitas*, contestation and beyond

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## Abstract

Anthropological study of pilgrimage has increased in recent years, and much work has been dominated by one of two theoretical paradigms. The older, Turnerian depiction of anti-structure and *communitas* has been influential but appears to be contradicted by Eade and Sallnow's more recent emphasis on the sacred as 'contested' at the great (Christian) pilgrimage sites. Reflecting on the newly published second edition of Eade and Sallnow's volume, this article suggests some of the reasons for the growth in pilgrimage studies and proposes some future theoretical areas of interest. In the process, it seeks to highlight important but largely implicit areas of theoretical overlap between the *communitas* and 'contestation' paradigms.

## Key Words

*communitas* • contestation • pilgrimage • travel

Anthropology has always had its blind spots. Until recently, pilgrimage was certainly one of these – a phenomenon practised by millions around the world, attracting ever-increasing levels of participation, and yet with little to show for itself in terms of ethnographic coverage or theoretical analysis (Turner, 1992: vii). Hertz's (1983) early study of the Alpine cult of 'St Besse', first published in 1913, made little impact on subsequent studies of religious institutions (cf. Bowman, 1993: 432), while even Wolf's (1958) much better-known study of the Virgin of Guadalupe was as much a (brief) Durkheimian meditation on the power of symbolism as it was an ethnographic consideration of Mexican pilgrimage.

Something of a watershed occurred with the publication of Victor and Edith Turner's *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978). The Turners drew on already established interests in the processual analysis of ritual and symbolism as well as on their personal attachment to Roman Catholicism, while also signalling a methodological departure from their African fieldwork. As Victor Turner put it (Turner and Turner, 1978: xxiv): "The 'extended-case method' has been temporarily set aside, the 'social

drama" abandoned, in order to expound the interrelations of symbols and meanings framing and motivating pilgrim behavior in a major world religion.' The considerable influence of the book emerged primarily from its further development and exemplification of a theoretical construct – that of *communitas* – whose relevance was assumed by the Turners to extend beyond circumscribed social fields into a broader 'Christian culture' that transcended historical, geographical and social boundaries.<sup>1</sup> *Communitas* described the individual pilgrim's temporary transition away from mundane structures and social interdependence into a looser commonality of feeling with fellow visitors; it clearly drew on metaphors of liminality within rites of passage, but in *Image and Pilgrimage* also illustrated 'progress from the ludergic liminal to the ergic liminoid' (1978: 36); in other words, was the result of voluntary rather than societally enforced removal from the everyday world.

The Turners' approach proved hegemonic within an ethnographic and theoretical field that had hitherto barely been ploughed. Appadurai (1988; cf. Feld and Basso, 1996) has argued that anthropology tends to present particular places as metonyms for distinct social modalities: India signifies hierarchy, New Guinea stands for exchange, and so on. One can suggest that, as an institution rather than a place, post-Turnerian pilgrimage came to signify the social modality of 'anti-structure' within anthropological accounts. *Image and Pilgrimage* gained influence partly because it provided an ambitious alternative to more straightforwardly Durkheimian approaches such as that of Wolf, and partly no doubt because *communitas* seemed particularly appealing in intellectual contexts that had experienced the quasi-spiritual, quasi-political revolutionary ecstasies of the 1960s. Most subsequent writers have felt compelled either to support or disprove the anti-structure paradigm, even when examining non-Christian contexts.

Yamba (1995: 9) sees the Turnerian view as ironically producing a kind of theoretical strait-jacket, restricting further development and making work in other areas of anthropology seem more dynamic. He suggests that the most interesting recent research on pilgrimage has in fact come from scholars who have chosen to 'do their own thing', precisely 'because anthropologists who embark on the study of pilgrimage almost all start out debating with the pronouncements of Victor Turner, whose framework they invariably employ as a point of departure, but beyond whose initial formulations and questions they never venture'. Gradually, however, the weight of social scientific opinion has concluded that everyday political, economic and social concerns clearly do impinge upon and even constitute pilgrimage, including that carried out to the great spiritual centres.<sup>2</sup> The Turners have been seen as confusing sociological reality with theological idealism, and of producing a paradigm that works, if at all, rather better for Christian than for non-Christian contexts.<sup>3</sup> Cohen (1992: 35) notes that, in Roman Catholicism, there exists an institutionalized separation between political and religious domains (Pope and Emperor cultivate separate if complementary spheres of authority), so that the location of pilgrimage sites in 'peripheral' areas might have some logic – even if a place such as Rome is not exactly an isolated hamlet. However, he sees this logic as ethnocentric in its purview and therefore as failing to take account of those contexts, common in 'Eastern' religions, where political and religious domains cannot be ideologically separated from each other.<sup>4</sup> Van der Veer (1989: 59–60), meanwhile, approves of the Turnerian attempt to go beyond functionalist depictions of religion as representation of society, but is less happy with the dichotomizing involved in presenting individual versus

society, free choice versus obligation, *communitas* versus structure. He also sees the anti-structural emphasis as misleadingly objectifying *part* of an ideology that can be found in 'universal religions'.

The most sustained response so far to *Image and Pilgrimage* has been provided by Eade and Sallnow's important and exceptionally well integrated volume of conference papers (1991), not least because as editors they both challenge the anti-structure hypothesis and posit a new, general approach to the anthropological study of (Christian) pilgrimage. One of the main sources of criticism of *communitas*, that it failed to take account of the mundane conflicts inherent in pilgrimage, is used as the very foundation of the new approach. *Communitas* is seen as just one idealizing discourse about pilgrimage rather than an empirical description of it (1991: 5). Eade and Sallnow's much-quoted introduction thus presents pilgrimage as a capacious arena capable of accommodating many competing religious and secular discourses:

The power of a shrine . . . derives in large part from its character as a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices – though of course the shrine staff might attempt . . . to impose a single, official discourse. This . . . is what confers upon a major shrine its essential, universalistic character: its capacity to absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses . . . The sacred centre . . . appears as a vessel into which pilgrims devoutly pour their hopes, prayers, and aspirations. And in a perfect illustration of the classic Marxist model of fetishization and alienation, the shrine then appears to its devotees as if it were itself dispensing the divine power and healing balm which they seek. (Eade and Sallnow, 1991: 15–16)

They assert further that pilgrimage as an institution cannot actually be understood as a universal or homogeneous phenomenon but should instead be deconstructed into historically and culturally specific instances (1991: 3).

The Turnerian image of pilgrimage appears to have been shattered by this book. Intriguingly, some of Eade and Sallnow's argument was anticipated by Hertz, who was clearly aware of the ways in which a religious site might be interpreted in radically different ways by its various groupings of visitors (Hertz, 1983; cf. Bowman, 1993: 432). However, just as *communitas* was a theoretical construct of its time, so it is possible to see why discrepant discourses and interpretations have appealed to scholars during the 1990s and since, in an era when postmodern fragmentation seems rather more plausible than the search for unmediated experiences of unity. Ironically, the very timeliness of the volume raises a question mark over its depiction of heterogeneity as a defining feature of pilgrimage: one might ask what contemporary cultural phenomenon cannot, from a certain perspective, be viewed as contested? Nonetheless, John Eade<sup>5</sup> is correct to point out, in his new introduction to the second edition of the book (2000), that *Contesting the Sacred* is part of, and has contributed to, a renaissance in studies of pilgrimage.<sup>6</sup>

Simply tracing the contrasts between *communitas* and 'contestation' is tempting and, to some extent, revealing. However, in this article I want to suggest that we run the risk of devaluing the work of both the Turners and Eade and Sallnow in viewing our theoretical options in this way. My aims are threefold. First, to assess briefly why there has been a recent efflorescence of anthropological studies of pilgrimage. Second, to

demonstrate that the arguments of *Image and Pilgrimage* and of *Contesting the Sacred* are in certain respects not all that far apart – indeed I hope to show that they reveal some striking theoretical similarities, once a nuanced view of their respective approaches is taken. Third, to consider some of the future directions for an anthropology of pilgrimage.

### PILGRIMAGE 'DISCOVERED'

Why did anthropologists ignore pilgrimage for so long? The most commonly articulated reason has been the sheer difficulty of defining and carrying out conventional fieldwork on sacred travel. Traditional ethnographic practice has taken 'a fixed socio-cultural unit' (Morinis, 1992: 2) as the ideal object of study, but this approach is obviously challenged by a cultural phenomenon that is constituted by movements of individuals and groups from unlimited points of departure (cf. Dubisch, 1995: 7). To the problems of spatial unboundedness can be added temporal ephemerality (Preston, 1992: 32), given the transitory nature of most pilgrimage behaviour from the viewpoint of specific pilgrims or groups.

Various strategies have recently been deployed to adapt the gathering of ethnographic data to 'unbounded' and often temporary units of study. Gold's (1988) sensitive study of Rajasthani pilgrims focusses on a single travelling group and argues for the need to look at the journey as a round trip, incorporating return as well as the original seeking of a goal. Frey's (1998) work on the *Camino* leading to Compostela barely mentions arrival at the site, but concentrates instead on encounters with fellow travellers, of varying nationalities and spiritual persuasions, along the route. Fieldwork along the Camino is then complemented by follow-up studies of pilgrims months or even years after their original journey.<sup>7</sup>

In practice, the very factors that might previously have stalled studies of pilgrimage are now bringing it more to the fore of ethnographic attention. Turner himself (1992: viii) notes that the simultaneous rise of the anthropology of tourism along with that of pilgrimage is no accident, since both areas of study have become metaphors for a world on the move, 'where rapid transportation and the mass media are moving millions literally or mentally out of the stasis of localization'. Clifford (1997: 39) has recently suggested that the notion of pilgrimage is of particular use as a comparative term in contemporary ethnographic writing since (despite its sacred associations) it includes a broad range of western and non-western experiences and is less class- and gender-based than 'travel'. His use of the term relates to a broader project of exploring how practices of displacement are not incidental to, but actually constitutive of, cultural meanings in a world that is constantly 'en route', made up not of autonomous socio-cultural wholes but complex, interactive conjunctures. Fine studies by Orsi (1985) and Tweed (1997) relate pilgrimage<sup>8</sup> to the articulation of diasporic identities, involving displacement and 're-emplacement' simultaneously. The rendering of place and space as in need of study within both emic and etic models has become part of an anthropology that, for better or worse, is becoming as much 'problem-' as 'village-' or 'tribe-' centred (Yamba, 1995: 8–9). Eade (2000: xxiii), meanwhile, refers to what he sees as the broadly 'postmodern' impulses that have influenced both pilgrimage and theorizing about pilgrimage, and highlights his and Sallnow's original dissatisfaction with universalist, structural models of human beliefs and practices (Eade and Sallnow, 1991; Eade, 2000: ix). *Contesting the*

*Sacred*, in its older and newer forms, might therefore seem symptomatic of a kind of release, a broadening out of what anthropologists can do theoretically and methodologically, alongside an Oedipal if respectful rejection of Victor Turner's paternalistic influence. However, is the story quite that simple?

### COMMON GROUND

Let me start my comparison of the *communitas* and 'contestation' paradigms by exploring some of their nuances. Although the dominant metaphor in Eade and Sallnow's argument is that of engaged struggle between rival constituencies – by definition, 'contestation' cannot occur without an opponent – in practice, the implication of their 1991 volume is that the degree of *overt* conflict at a given site may vary. Sites do often provide the context for explicit oppositions (for instance between *brancardiers* and impatient bathers at Lourdes, or between local residents and Padre Pio 'groupies' at San Giovanni Rotondo) but discrepant discourses may also be juxtaposed without self-consciously orchestrated boundary-marking actually occurring. Referring briefly to another recent work on pilgrimage, we can even say that the degree of overt contestation is likely to vary according to circumstance: writing of Greek Orthodox pilgrimage to Tinos, Dubisch (1995: 221) notes that it is when pilgrimage is especially heavy that the church becomes contested space, since pilgrims start to compete for access to the icon.<sup>9</sup>

My point about the ambiguities of contestation is not a trivial one. Just as the Turnerian argument about *communitas* was rejected by scholars who went looking for it and could not find it in a way that they found ethnographically convincing, so the contestation paradigm could potentially be challenged by a simplistic reading that looks for it at a given site and instead finds a predominance of apparent harmony. In my view it is far more useful to regard contestation as an umbrella-term for multiple if related orientations, and thence to start refining its meaning. Eade and Sallnow's book does not specifically adopt such an approach, but it is possible to see how it would work by referring to the case studies which they present. For instance, Bowman's depiction of 'the various Jerusalems' (1991: 98) that are constituted through being criss-crossed by Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant evangelical Christians illustrates how these groups sometimes contend for ideological hegemony, but sometimes simply look (and walk) past each other in embodied confirmation of discrepant imaginaries which have been pre-formed at home. The reification of such imaginaries through sacred travel must be examined in a satisfactory account of the heterogeneity of the pilgrimage 'field', and not just the more visible clashes among religious activists. Under such circumstances 'contestation' moves towards a softer metaphor of a kind of 'trafficking', through which individuals or groups take account of but do not necessarily specifically interact with each other. It becomes possible to see how the juxtaposition of varied interpretations and practices need not be regarded as, by definition, reflecting overt struggles for hegemony in restricted cultural and geographical space.<sup>10</sup>

The contestation paradigm reveals its semiotic roots in the argument that varying 'discourses' can be housed under a flexible sacred canopy or 'vessel'. One consequence of this view is that pilgrimage is presented more as a context for the representation and reinforcement of ideas than as involving embodied practices. Physicality is mentioned in the book (Eade and Sallnow, 1991), but is mostly deployed to indicate contests over signification. Thus, the suffering body is analysed in the two chapters on Lourdes (by

Eade and Dahlberg), but it is largely analysed as a *representation*, reflecting theological and interpretative battles between ecclesiastical élites and lay pilgrims. We should not, however, assume that the postmodern slide of pilgrimage signifiers is presented as proceeding without check. Chapters in the volume emphasize conflict and discrepancy at the shrine-level, but retain the right to depict coherent, shared structures of meaning within specific communities of interpretation (cf. Coleman, 2001). In McKevitt's chapter, his 'locals' on the one hand, and his Padre Pio groupies on the other, represent competing but internally consistent appropriations of their hero's legacy. Dahlberg's Lourdes is the catalyst for sacrificial and miraculous discourses that broadly map on to clerical and lay interest-groups respectively. The analysis of heterogeneity in Bowman's chapter largely ceases at the level of the various theological positions he outlines. Such inter- rather than intra-group variation is likely (at least partially) to be an artefact of the structure of an edited volume: individual chapters are not granted much space to explore ethnographic complexities. At the same time, the book does suggest the possibility of a kind of *communitas* within contestation, or more accurately the existence of (relative) fixities of meaning that correlate with socially discrete units. Indeed, in another article (on Christian and Muslim Palestinian use of two West Bank Christian holy places), Bowman (1993) searches for the conditions under which publicly expressed identities and positions might become consolidated. His argument is that the multivocality of a holy place can become more univocal or at least 'fixed' in periods of intense social conflict through the recognition, on the part of members of diverse but conjoined communities, of an external antagonism that endangers the survival of all of them.

Just as contestation is more complex than it might at first appear, so the apparent wholesale deconstruction of universalist narratives of pilgrimage deserves to be examined a little more closely. Eade and Sallnow suggest (1991: 3), in the best ethnographic tradition, that there is no 'pilgrimage', only pilgrimages. However, they do relent to the extent of suggesting that Christian pilgrimages might usefully be analysed in terms of a triad of elements: person, place and text. This is a fruitful proposal, although not one that they can develop very far in their introduction, and some of its implications are explored in Stirrat's chapter, which tries to understand the historical shift from place- to person-centred pilgrimage in Catholic Sri Lanka. Furthermore, despite their deconstructive tendencies, Eade and Sallnow do also depict pilgrimage shrines as having a certain kind of 'essential' character and function: precisely that of containing and objectifying multiple discourses. Perhaps other institutions do this as well, but we are given to assume that major shrines *must* do so. In addition, as my extended quotation from their introduction (see earlier) demonstrates, Eade and Sallnow's overt rejection of Marxist narratives does not prevent them from perceiving religious discourses as ideologies developed by interest groups, nor from employing a perfectly plausible theory of objectification and alienation (cf. Eade, 2000: xxi). Shrines are shown not merely to *encompass* varying assumptions and hopes, but also to *fetishize* these assumptions and convert them into sacralized forms which can then be re-consumed. In other words, as part of the process of being appropriated by pilgrims, shrines are invested with a certain kind of authoritative animation, a sense that they can both reflect and affect aspects of people's lives.

Just as Eade and Sallnow's work needs to be read carefully rather than plundered by



those looking for an off-the-shelf, easy-to-use theoretical tool with which to 'analyse' pilgrimage, so the Turners' work is more complex, and in my view richer, than it is sometimes given credit for. As Eade himself has pointed out (1992: 19, 2000: x–xi), *communitas* is actually a multi-faceted paradigm, with the ideal and spontaneous manifestation of 'existential' *communitas* usually giving way to 'normative', systematized forms at particular shrines. Nor do the Turners see the aspiration of escaping political and economic structures as necessarily more than an aspiration: they admit (1978: 137) that the 'purity' of *communitas* is all too easily compromised by the 'sin' of social structure, with its associated divisions and pragmatic accommodations.

Despite their apparent oppositions, the anti-structural and contestation paradigms actually display some interesting similarities.<sup>11</sup> The idea of a shrine accommodating a multiplicity of discourses is not so far from the Turnerian notion that dominant symbols contain within them a fan of meanings and are (Turner and Turner, 1978: 245) 'semantically open'. The Turners, in common with Eade and Sallnow, are very well aware of the possibilities of dynamic tension between official and lay or popular views, and note that 'a symbol's meaning is much more than its legitimate interpretation' (Turner and Turner, 1978: 146). More intriguingly, some of the dominant theoretical metaphors used by the two 'camps' are rather alike. Both the Turners and Eade and Sallnow create sociological vacuums in order then to fill these gaps with their respective views of what pilgrimage must essentially be about. In *Image and Pilgrimage* (Turner and Turner, 1978), the necessary empty space is produced by stripping off identity, which results in *communitas*— ideally a state of unmediated and egalitarian association among individuals who are temporarily set free from hierarchical roles. In Eade and Sallnow's *Contesting the Sacred*, blankness is depicted in the image of the shrine as religious 'void', an 'empty vessel' that is open to the assumptions that will be poured into it by constituencies of pilgrims. If the Turners construct a vacuum in order to differentiate pilgrimage activity from the everyday, Eade and Sallnow do so for the opposite reason: they wish to indicate how shrines do *not* strip away mundane conflicts and assumptions, but rather provide exceptionally accommodating (and possibly amplifying) contexts for them to be expressed.<sup>12</sup> Both arguments are compelling because they undoubtedly touch on possible elements of pilgrimage practice, or at least rhetoric. Yet we do the authors and ourselves a disservice if we see their work as one-dimensional and entirely mutually antagonistic. Neither *communitas* nor contestation should themselves become fetishized in order to produce neatly symmetrical anthropological theory, made up of views that appear to constitute a simple binary opposition.

We also simplify the situation if we depict the Turners' position as that of committed religionists in opposition to the more playful postmodernism of Eade and Sallnow. Eade's deep knowledge of Lourdes originally came from his annual participation at the site as a male helper (*brancardier*) for over 20 years, during which time he pursued his anthropological interests elsewhere. His and Sallnow's postmodernism may emerge from an emphasis on discrepant discourses, scepticism towards grand narratives and mistrust of the very category of pilgrimage, but, as Dubisch notes (1995: 45), the Turnerian approach itself calls attention to postmodern issues of performance and staging (and, one might add, both play and reflexivity).<sup>13</sup> *Image and Pilgrimage* is also notable for its attempt to understand pilgrimage sites not as bounded entities but both in dialogue with each other and as contexts for dynamic historical and ritual fields of practice. At times,



the 'flows' highlighted by the Turners look just as, if not more, postmodern as Eade and Sallnow's emphasis on empty 'vessels'.

Ironically, the very success of the dominant metaphors presented by *Image and Pilgrimage* and *Contesting the Sacred* has tended to obscure some of the other contributions these books have made – or might make – to the study of pilgrimage and beyond. Eade's new introduction (2000: xiii) locates the volume in the exciting intellectual context of an expanding anthropology of Europe. The person-place-text triad, although undeveloped in the book, has prompted a recent PhD dissertation on the journeys of Anglican clerics to Jerusalem (Llewellyn, 2000). The Turners, meanwhile, provide a much greater appreciation of the architectural and material specificities of pilgrimage than is normal in anthropological accounts (cf. Ousterhout, 1990). From them we learn not only about the historical and contemporary practices associated with such shrines as Guadalupe or Lough Derg, but also about the iconography and complex spatiality of the ritual processes they encompass.

### STEPPING INTO THE FUTURE

So does pilgrimage remain a useful analytical concept? Given the large number of continued attempts to define the phenomenon, to seek common features of such ritual forms as the Muslim *hajj*, Jewish *aliya*, and Hindu *yatra*, it seems that many authors still think it is worth trying to construct an etic category for theoretical purposes. Thus, for Morinis (1992: 2), pilgrimage is a 'quest for the sacred', characterized by a 'pursuit of the ideal', and he states that (1992: 15) all pilgrimages must contain both a journey and a goal. Dubisch (1995: 38) argues that pilgrimage depends on '(1) the association created within a particular religious tradition of certain events and/or sacred figures with a particular field of space, and (2) the notion that the material world can make manifest the invisible spiritual world at such places'. The list could go on. I want, however, to argue for an apparently paradoxical standpoint in the face of such attempts to pin down the term. It seems to me that it is important that people continue to try to define what they mean by 'pilgrimage',<sup>14</sup> but I am not convinced that the content of any single definition matters very much. I mean here that we should always be made aware of what a given author thinks that he or she is talking about, but should not assume that over time we shall collectively achieve an ever more precise and universally applicable set of criteria with which finally to pin down 'the' activity of pilgrimage. The kinds of behaviours that make anthropologists (and travellers themselves) regard people as pilgrims will inevitably change over time as systems of transport, articulations of spirituality, secular ideologies, forms of syncretism and so on are transformed. The course of Dubisch's work exemplifies this point, as her research focus has gone on an intellectual and ethnographic journey, moving from a 'self-evident' pilgrimage site involving a Christian shrine in Greece (1995) to a less conventional tracing of the meanings for Vietnam veterans of collective journeying by motorcycle (cf. Coleman and Eade, 2000). The problems associated with comparative work on pilgrimage are therefore no less but certainly no greater than those associated with cross-cultural analyses of ritual, prayer, belief or even culture (and of course 'pilgrimage' is likely to encompass all or some of these elements).

In certain respects, then, I favour Eade and Sallnow's approach: a healthy scepticism towards overtly essentialist claims can indeed be combined with a *de facto* acceptance

of the intellectual worth of grouping together forms of 'sacred travel' from Sri Lanka, France, Israel, Italy and Peru. I wish to add two important provisos, however. First, that we should be *aware* of the fact that we are always performing a definitional balancing act, that we are suggesting comparisons that can never be seen as all-encompassing or as emerging 'naturally' from the data. Second – a point that is perhaps more important and more interesting – that we do not fall into the trap of *confining* our work to a pilgrimage ghetto, a theoretical cul-de-sac where it is assumed that the only relevant points of debate relate to other studies that purport to focus on pilgrimage. Awareness of this trap surely contributes to Yamba's reference to the anti-structural 'strait-jacket' that constrained immediately post-Turnerian works on pilgrimage. His injunction to 'do one's own thing' is therefore a powerful call to broaden our theoretical and ethnographic horizons. Sacred travel frequently overlaps with tourism, trade, migration, expressions of nationalism, creations of diasporas, imagining communities . . . this list could go on, too. The point is that we must not adopt the rather western habit of treating the category of religion, and everything associated with it, as *ideally* an autonomous, isolated realm of human activity, and therefore as an autonomous, isolated realm of anthropological theorizing. When I write about pilgrimage I write in the first instance as an anthropologist, and only secondarily as an anthropologist of religion.

A sign of maturity in any sub-field of anthropology must be that it is able to encompass, and speak to, more than one theoretical paradigm at a time. Both *communitas* and 'contestation' have proved exceptionally good tools for scholars to think with, but despite their status as metaphors of revolt, or at least deconstruction, they have created structures of theory that run the risk of confining conversations about pilgrimage to those scholars who happen to like to talk about religion. Why should we assume that pilgrimage must be 'about' any one thing, whether it be heightened conflict or the heightened absence of it? The logic of my argument leads me to conclude that the most valuable work in this area is that which looks outward, making points about human behaviour *through* using 'pilgrimage' as a case-study rather than focussing *on* the institution itself as a firmly bounded category of action.

Let me give some examples of work that, in my opinion, already performs this function of stimulating our intellectual imaginations. It is true that Jill Dubisch devotes a chapter of her book on Tinos (1995) to 'The Anthropological Study of Pilgrimage', but the power of her work actually derives from what she says about gender, suffering and the construction of ethnography. Her critical reflections on honour and shame address a topic that has been central to a more traditional anthropology of Europe (and in particular the Mediterranean), but take it in new directions by demonstrating how it reveals much about androcentric discourses of fieldwork. Nancy Tapper's (1990) discussion of *ziyaret* subtly indicates the links among voluntary movement, gender relations, notions of respect and forms of reciprocity in a Turkish community. She avoids the trap of presenting such movement as somehow isolated from the rest of local culture, while also showing how it can inform reflections on such classic but still fertile theoretical conceptions as the gift and forms of exchange. Thomas Tweed (1997) focusses on a shrine sacred to the Cuban Catholic community in exile in Florida, but he uses his data to reflect on how visitors orient themselves in space, time and history. His book becomes less a description of pilgrimage in and for itself, and more a rich analysis of how Cuba is imagined and recreated through various modes of religious cartography.

Although he does not focus on this issue, it seems to me that Tweed's work also raises a promising area of future study for students of pilgrimage: the ways in which migration, which may be more or less *involuntary* as an action, can subsequently be reflected upon, revisited and even transformed by ritual movements that are rather more *voluntarily* undertaken by participants. Can we see pilgrimages as sometimes 'domesticating' and providing alternative meanings for experiences of displacement?<sup>15</sup>

In my work on the Christian pilgrimage site of Walsingham I am interested not only in emic understandings of pilgrimage but also in the relationship between movement and memory, and in particular the experiences of pilgrims who return to the site year after year. As we have seen, much work on pilgrimage (particularly that influenced by the Turnerian paradigm) has tended to assume that the 'special' nature of sacred travel derives from its being divorced from the routines and habits of everyday life. What interests me, however, is the incorporation of pilgrimage into a much wider, predictable, annual round of religious activity that translates Walsingham into a second 'home' for many pilgrims, complete with its accretions of both valued 'tradition' and personal memories of past visits with close friends and valued relatives (cf. Coleman, 2000; also Rapport and Dawson, 1998).<sup>16</sup>

Pilgrimage as religious activity still provides meaningful places for people to visit, while as (fuzzy) object of academic discourse it continues to offer significant room for anthropological theorizing. In delimiting an area of research for ourselves, we should not allow such ethnographically rich spaces to become prisons of limited comparison. Belief in the worth of studying pilgrimage can become self-defeating if it turns into dogmatic assertions of what sacred travel must, or must not, contain.

## Notes

- 1 Victor Turner also discussed *communitas* in relation to his African fieldwork – see e.g. *The Ritual Process* (1969: 96–7). A statement in *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual* (1975: 21–2) features a startling juxtaposition of experiences: 'The empirical base of this concept was to some extent my experience of friendship during the war as a noncombatant private soldier in a British bomb-disposal unit. But it was mainly village life in Africa which convinced me that spontaneous, immediate, concrete relationships between individuals not only were personally rewarding but also had theoretical significance.'
- 2 See e.g. Eickelman (1976), Pfaffenberger (1979), Messerschmidt and Sharma (1981), Sallnow (1981), Van der Veer (1984) and Morinis (1984).
- 3 An irony of this criticism of Victor Turner is of course that he originally contributed to the Manchester School's attempt to respond to criticisms of structural-functionalism as incapable of explaining social change and conflict (Eade, 2000).
- 4 According to Cohen, in 'Eastern' contexts formal pilgrimages will take place to a politico-religious centre, which is the centre of the world (rather than a Turnerian 'Centre Out There').
- 5 Michael Sallnow tragically died just after the first edition of *Contesting the Sacred* was completed. The new (second) edition of the book (University of Illinois Press, ISBN 0 252 06940 4 pbk) contains all of the old material alongside Eade's introduction and a brief note by McKeivitt on recent developments at San Giovanni Rotondo.

- 6 Perhaps one might equally accurately call it a 'naissance', rather than a 'renaissance', since an original Golden Age of pilgrimage studies has never existed.
- 7 On the other hand, Yamba's (1995) ethnography of 'permanent pilgrims' to Mecca is necessarily rather different if also innovative, since it examines third-, fourth-, even fifth-generation immigrants who have lived all their lives in Sudan, yet still regard themselves as being in transit to their ultimate goal. Thus the task facing Yamba is to develop an understanding of the 'perpetuation of the ideology of pilgrim-ness' over many decades (1995: 120).
- 8 Or at least annual processions in Orsi's case.
- 9 Furthermore, while it is clear that pilgrims to Tinos do not necessarily perform rituals in explicit defiance of church controls, their activities are nonetheless only partially organized and controlled by ecclesiastical authorities.
- 10 One might add that, just as the notion of *communitas*, despite its universalizing ambitions, should be seen as emerging from particular religious and cultural ways of seeing the world, so defining 'contestation' as a central object of study might itself be seen as a rather western, or Christian, thing to do. Need we assume that the expression of differences of opinion must be seen as involving a compromising of idealized doctrinal purity, or an automatically problematic insertion of power relations into religious practices? Again, Cohen's (1992) examination of the dynamics of non-Christian pilgrimage is a useful indication of the need to be aware of how theoretical claims are underpinned by cultural assumptions.
- 11 Eade addresses some of these points in his useful introduction. He notes (2000: xiv) that he and Sallnow shared with the Turners (and supporters of correspondence models) an interest in power, group conflict, and systems of meaning. He wonders whether, in their enthusiasm for contestation, he and Sallnow overstated their deconstruction of pilgrimage and underestimated the influence of master narratives on their thinking (2000: xxi).
- 12 The Turnerian void renders the *pilgrim* 'available' to others without cultural hindrances; the Eade/Sallnow void renders the *site* available (i.e. receptive) to the discourses of pilgrims without such hindrances.
- 13 Although neither volume deals very much with tourism, the authors on both sides are certainly aware of the potential overlaps with secular forms of travel and leisure (Turner, 1982; Eade, 1992; cf. Reader and Walter, 1993).
- 14 For instance, Eric Cohen's essay (1992) on 'Pilgrimage Centers: Concentric and Excentric' is a stimulating attempt to locate Turner's view of pilgrimage within a wider definitional model that takes account of non-Christian as well as Christian contexts. There are some problems with Cohen's account – he slots 'homogenized' Buddhist sites rather rigidly into preconceived parts of his model – but its considerable value comes from its juxtaposition of definitional rigour with inevitably complex ethnographic cases.
- 15 In Turnerian terms, we can see this crudely as the transformation of relatively enforced and undesirable liminality into a relatively optative form of the liminoid.
- 16 See also Coleman (1998), Coleman and Eade (2000) and Mitchell (2001) for overviews of some of these debates. In addition, John Eade and I (2000) are currently working on an edited volume of essays looking at sacred travel as a mediator between macro-levels of globalization and micro-levels of embodiment.

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