

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

Dr. Alexander Chirila, 2016

Abstract:

There have been pilgrimages to sacred sites since the beginning of human history. These geo-spiritual movements have only recently become commercialized and marketed as forms of spiritual tourism. Spiritual tourism is a uniquely contemporary phenomenon, conditioned by modern advancements in transportation and access to information. The spiritual experience itself, a psychologically transformative event, remains implicit in the terms of exchange and subject to questions of authenticity. The pilgrim-tourist completes a circuit, returning home potentially changed by this experience, instigating a dramatic reinterpretation of both the object and the culture that “produces” it. There are tensions at sites of pilgrimage and within belief systems that are resolved in the creation of new interpretive paradigms to accommodate the modern pilgrim-tourist. This article examines the role of those who participate in the exchange facilitated by spiritual tourism, as well as the object of their exchange: the spiritual experience itself.

Key Words: Pilgrimage, Spirituality, Tourism, Pilgrim-Tourist, Spiritual Experience

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

Introduction

In the Amazon jungle outside of Iquitos, Peru, a group of travelers converges on a small complex of cabins. They are going to meet the plant-teacher Ayahuasca¹ under the supervision of a *maestro*. They have come for many reasons; some face psychological and emotional challenges that they feel can be resolved using traditional, indigenous methodologies. Others are simply curious about the transformative spiritual experiences promised by the set and setting. Some may even believe that the brew, gathered and prepared here in the jungle by trained practitioners, will lay bare the hidden worlds and mysteries that they feel must exist just beyond the range of their normative perceptions. Many have also paid a good deal of money to participate.

Many of these visitors can be called *pilgrims*, in the sense that they are undertaking a journey for spiritual reasons, located within a greater narrative of personal transformation that anticipates a genuine and profound experience. This experience is often highly emotional, even incommunicable, but it is undeniably shaped by the frames of preconceptions, associations, and other imaginative elements that surround it. These frames are constructed by the pilgrims themselves *a priori*, as well as by the contexts surrounding the pilgrimage sites. “This is how it will feel,” the pilgrim may say, “to walk in the footsteps of Christ”; “to circumambulate the Kaaba”; “to meditate in the presence of the Bodhi Tree.”

Or, as in the aforementioned example, to experience the power of Ayahuasca in the Amazon. However, unlike pilgrims that travel to the sacred sites of their respective faiths, there are others who visit sites as tourists also—who may or may not be religious devotees or practitioners, but who seek transformative experiences nonetheless; or who, unable to access numinous experiences in their own immediate circumstances, seek them in exotic and far-off locales that are somehow marketed as “spiritual.”²

Pilgrims have been journeying to sacred sites for thousands of years. Many of the world’s pilgrimage-sites are well known, including Mecca, Rome, and Jerusalem, as well as Buddhist shrines and sacred places from the Indian subcontinent to the islands of Japan. Nearly every world religion supports the concept of pilgrimage, a geo-spiritual journey that culminates in a potentially transformative spiritual, mystical and/or religious experience.

¹ According to one the MAPS studies concerning the psychotherapeutic benefits of ayahuasca, the “spiritual or transpersonal aspects of the ayahuasca experience were reported to have been pivotal in the recovery process. Many interviewed ritual participants reported spiritual peak experiences that fostered a connection with the divine: a spiritual power or existential values infusing life with meaning, providing a sense of relief from confusion, and promoting feelings of wholeness and inner balance....Ayahuasca therapy should therefore be understood as a ritual-based intervention and not solely as a pharmacological one” (Loizaga-Velder 2013:39).

² Rich Doyle writes on Ayahuasca, “What draws many of the tourists seeking the ayahuasca experience in South America is unique, albeit globalized context of an erudite and healing shaman guiding visions in a vanishing rain forest, the very habitat of the alkaloid exuding plant allies. This is most certainly what is being sold in ayahuasca tourism, as a glimpse at websites offering these trips makes clear” (2005:9).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

The completion of a pilgrimage is often expected to confer spiritual favors on those who undertake it for the right reasons. These reasons can often be described as religious (veneration, thanksgiving, supplication), spiritual (transformation, communion) and/or mystical (invocation, empowerment). Pilgrimages are often undertaken for the sake of physical benefits, as well. From France to Nigeria, New Zealand to Guatemala, wells, shrines, groves and caves have received visitors seeking their curative and restorative properties.

The motives of the pilgrim are central to the success of the journey, and these can be highly personal as well as social. The Muslim *hajj*, for example, is an intensely communal experience as well as a religious and spiritual one³. The journey itself is an archetypal progression, a narrative layered with interpenetrating matrices of meaning. These matrices may be personal as well as structured by cultural and psychosocial ideations. Pilgrimage-narratives may be embedded within religious systems of belief, like the *Camino de Santiago*, while others may be reconstructed, historical, or contemporary. Others may be centered on traditional indigenous sites that have since gained in popularity, like the Osun Oshogbo grove, where thousands of pilgrim-tourists converge to participate in the annual Festival⁴.

The central pilgrim-narrative revolves around four essential components: the geo-psychological-spiritual destination, the pilgrim, the journey, and the experience that is expected or anticipated upon completion⁵. A pilgrimage to Graceland in the United States, for example, while still a pilgrimage according to the arrangement of its elements, is not the same as an Aboriginal journey to Uluru. Pilgrimage-sites are not static; they change with the times, and are subject to death and rebirth as are many of the gods formerly venerated at their altars. A close examination of any pilgrimage-narrative would be incomplete without situating it temporally. Now, the journey is affected by mass transportation; the

³ Paul O'Conner, looking at the experiences of Hong Kong Muslims on the pilgrimage, writes: "In 2013 it was possible to follow *hajj* via the photos which numerous pilgrims were uploading to social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram. Two blogs of particular note provided updates about the *hajj* on a daily basis including photos, personal insights, and even business opportunities" (2013:324).

⁴ Peter Probst writes, "What has taken place is the transformation of a formerly 'local' festival into a 'global' event, with nowadays numerous entries on the Internet, and attended by thousands of visitors from all over the world...Whereas for the palace, the Osun festival is a spectacle celebrated 'with pomp and pageantry' (Osogbo Heritage Council 2000:8), whose aim is, first and foremost, to commemorate the foundation of [Osogbo], for others it is mainly a pilgrimage to give homage to the goddess and accept the reality of her spiritual force and power" (2004:51).

⁵ Robin M. Taylor suggests that "an exploration of the [Muslim *hajj*] can help us to build a new model of Christian pilgrimage," and begins by pointing out that "John Paul II used pilgrimage to the places where Jesus lived as a personal means of experiencing this connection with Jesus," and similarly, "The Hajj [is also] a deeply personal experience...pilgrims describe it as a deeply satisfying spiritual experience. Despite extremely public processions, the pilgrim is still able to enter a state of fulfillment of his or her religious life. For many, this is expressed as a vital piece of a spiritual voyage of discovery" (2011:266).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

destination by the economics of tourism and development; and the spiritual experience itself by the contexts surrounding it⁶.

The pilgrim—though still an archetypal figure of religious, spiritual and mystical experience—is now circumscribed by other systems that dramatically affect how the narrative is expressed. While there are traditional pilgrims around the world who undertake journeys to local or national sites as religious devotees, there are thousands who do so as international travelers coming from disparate backgrounds, social environments, and cultures. These are more properly called *pilgrim-tourists*, and they are a uniquely contemporary phenomenon⁷.

Enfolded within a pilgrimage-narrative, the pilgrim-tourist can hope to condense a particular range of expectations, experiences, and interpretations. Circumscribed within a magnified frame of experience—from the departure to the return—the pilgrim-tourist may psychologically amplify the effects of related incidents and experiences on the pilgrimage⁸. It is important to remember that the pilgrimage-narrative does not belong to the tourist; he or she is participating in a shared narrative. Some tourists may not be aware of the deep histories of the roads they travel—roads that may have once been walked by saints, slaves, and soldiers—but those histories and the voices embedded within them are closer to the surface on a pilgrimage.

From Goddess Tours to Shamanic Homestays, healing trips to all-inclusive pilgrim-packages, the spiritual-tourism industry represents a new paradigm that merits further investigation for several reasons. First, it accelerates the processes of syncretism and cross-pollination that dramatically change the landscape of religious belief and practice.

Second, it requires the revising of existing typologies to include the pilgrim-tourist as one who can travel across the world in search of culturally significant ritual interactions. Third, the phenomenon creates a niche market that can exert considerable influence on local indigenous societies, as well as globally on many levels. Information on Amazonian shamanism is becoming increasingly sought after, for example, as more and more people

⁶ Jill DeTemple writes that “the blend of tourism and development...is a vehicle capable of radically rearranging people’s cosmologies. By becoming tourists...people gain a more complete and historicized sense of place in the world, and of the possibility of meaningful and sustained action within it. In many ways, tourism opens up the possibility of conversion, though a conversion inverted from its usual, colonial sense of change exclusive to Western values and lifeways” (2006:173).

⁷ Writing on pilgrimage-tourism in the Holy Land, N. Collins-Kreiner and N. Kliot point out that the “polarities of the pilgrimage-tourism axis are labeled as sacred vs. secular and between the extremities lie almost infinite possible sacred-secular combinations, with the central area generally termed ‘religious tourism’” (2000:56).

⁸ Noga Collins-Kreiner writes, “The detachment from everyday life enables the pilgrim to intensify his or her understanding of the spiritual meanings of his or her faith. But it also places him or her in a milieu where he or she is more open to new experiences, ready and willing to meet new people, hear new things, and reconsider some of his or her unquestioned assumptions. At the same time, the travel framework that most choose—the guided tour—is an ‘environmental bubble’” (2009:439).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

hear about Ayahuasca. This, in turn, has resulted in the growth of local and nonlocal markets centered on the shamanic brew and those who administer it⁹. Unsurprisingly, there are more dangerous elements to this new market: a variety of predatory spirituality, where charlatans and practitioners peddle false promises to the unwary.

Sacred sites around the world are spiritually potent because of their historical and cultural contexts¹⁰. Now-popular sites of pilgrimage may be considered *less* potent because they have been contaminated by their exposure to, and involvement in, mass tourism and commercialization¹¹.

Pilgrim-tourism may foster interreligious dialogue and introduce new ideas into contemporary matrices of belief. This phenomenon may also yield a new harvest of comingled ideas and practices that could enhance the vigor of both individual and communal spiritualities¹². Religious synthesis, blending, and syncretism is as old as religion. The pilgrim-tourist's motivation, while not necessarily selfish, is nonetheless self-orientated; that is, directed towards the Self¹³. New communities are being created based

⁹ Referring to tourists seeking Ayahuasca in the Amazon, Rich Doyle points out that "some will, of course, rely on chance to be their shaman: if the mood is right, they will drink whatever disgusting beverage is put before them...The plants that make up classic ayahuasca are legally and readily available on the Internet. Recipes abound on the Web that enable would-be ayahuasqueros to concoct brews out of plants that grow readily and widely around North America and Europe and Australia. Some contemporary ayahuasca drinkers create the admixture entirely through pharmaceuticals" (2005:9).

¹⁰ Trude A. Fonneland writes, "It is also in the context of indigenous spirituality that the Sámi pre-Christian religion, *noaidevuohta*, has been promoted and marketed in a tourism context intended for contemporary consumption demands, despite the fact that this local tradition, with its associated symbols, is a controversial topic in the Sámi community...when the Sámi people were incorporate into the international indigenous movement and into global discourses concerning indigenous spirituality, their pre-Christian religious symbols were included in new aesthetic frames and in processes of cultural heritage production where spirituality is highlighted as a positive cultural marker" (2013:196).

¹¹ Tone Bleie writes, "The increasing numbers of pilgrims who make use of modern mechanical means of transportation erode basic ideas of the individual, of temporality, and of the landscape that that have underpinned Himalayan pilgrimage for centuries" (2003:183).

¹² "The signposting of spirituality at Sami Tour is a result of internal innovative processes where cultural elements from the past are retrieved in order to create awareness about Sámi culture in the tourism market...The appropriation of spirituality is used to negotiate social and cultural values in the present and is highlighted as a vital prerequisite for regional economic regeneration. As cultural resources in the promotion of Sápmi, discourses about indigenous spirituality enter into and contribute to shaping new stories about local community's nature, culture and history" (Fonneland 2013:205).

¹³ Carrette and King (*Selling Spirituality* 2005) acknowledge the community-oriented dimension of spirituality and the absence of this dimension in modern, individualized practice, orienting their efforts "to support a counter-discourse, grounded in an emphasis upon social justice and compassion, in order to displace the privatized and neoliberal framing of 'spirituality'" (172). Carrette and King suggest that the target market for those who appropriate, brand and sell these undefined spiritual products is controlled and coerced by forces actively vying to replace humanism with consumerism and social responsibility with reinforced individualism: "In this way, members of society are conditioned—socialized is the polite word for it—to see the world in a particular way" (11). Carrette and King are careful not to embark on any attempt to locate some "nodal point where 'true religion' or 'true spirituality' might be found" (171), choosing instead to

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

on spiritual tourism and the experiences facilitated by this mode of engagement. Within these communities, the experience itself is not an object, but a story within a story.

Every market around the world, whether local, national, or global, is the subject of a unique discourse that stretches far beyond the pilgrim-tourist and his/her immediate hosts. It includes historical, political, ideological, and mythological threads that exert their own influences on the layered and interpenetrating contexts that surround spiritual tourism. What is important here is how these threads intersect at points of tension. Pilgrim-tourists may find something of what they are looking for—spiritual experiences, restoration, revelation—but these objects will be something *new*, created in a contemporary context, mingling the traditional and adaptive. They may even contain hidden motives and ulterior designs¹⁴.

Pilgrim-Tourists and Spiritual Tourism

Pilgrim-tourists are not anthropologists or ethnographers. However respectful they may be towards their host cultures, they are not impartial observers. They are directly interested in specific spiritual and/or mystical experiences¹⁵. It is important to distinguish between the pilgrim who undertakes a journey to a site associated with his or her religion, and the pilgrim-tourist who travels to be exposed to intense spiritual, mystical and/or religious experiences that are contextual to other cultures, systems, and lifeways.

A further distinction involves pilgrim-tourists who travel to foreign countries to visit sites that are venerated by the belief systems to which they claim adherence. The American Catholic who visits Rome on a two-week vacation that will include tours of the Sistine Chapel and souvenirs—is he/she a pilgrim or a tourist? Many of these variations represent the anticipation of an entirely permeable field of interreligious discourse, made possible by

adopt a strategy that calls for the retaking of spirituality from the neoliberal market. Once retaken, however, and subjected to a critical analysis that would ideally separate the influence of market forces from the purer, socially oriented dimension of spirituality, there is no indication of where the *experiential* element of this reconfigured spirituality may be found.

¹⁴ Probst writes, “What turned out to be a delicate issue was the representation of the history of Osogbo given in the brochures. Often, the explanations given to the various places in the grove formed the occasion for expressing a careful critique, concerning the correctness of the information given in the texts. Discussing the matter in detail it soon became apparent that the palace is using the brochures to exclude rivaling claims and competing historical traditions in favor of the ruling royal lineage” (2004:48).

¹⁵ Kathryn Rountree, in her article “Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists: Inscribing the Body Through Sacred Travel,” points out that “Cohen has said that the tourist can be distinguished from the pilgrim in that the pilgrim traditionally hopes to experience religious ‘rapture,’ whereas the tourist seeks ‘mere pleasure and enjoyment’ (1992:53). The modern Goddess pilgrim avidly seeks *both* spiritual rapture and bodily pleasure. Asceticism and austerity are not ideals which have a place in pagan religious philosophy where the spirit/body split is meaningless and earthly pleasures are heartily celebrated” (2002:482).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

an age of consumerism and convenience, globalization and ubiquitous access to information¹⁶. “Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists: Inscribing the Body Through Sacred Travel.

We can look askance at the consumer who shops for the exotic without understanding the origin or symbolism of what he/she is purchasing, but the pilgrim-tourist is also taking advantage of what the global marketplace has made possible. Pilgrim-tourists are a double-edged blessing. On the one hand, they offer the opportunity for traditional cultures to preserve practices that are increasingly neglected by their own members. On the other, they endanger the very product or experience that is the object of their attentions, individually and/or collectively.

Their patronage may help preserve sites of veneration that would otherwise have fallen into disrepair, but in increasing numbers they may diminish the intimacy and immediacy that are requisite to intense spiritual, religious and/or mystical experiences. Many, if not all, spiritual paths involve experiences that require advanced guidance to integrate and understand; not the sort of guidance that one can obtain from a book or from superficial engagement. This creates a number of conflicts that are central to the pilgrimage-tourism axis: authenticity vs. hoax and charlatanry, commitment vs. dalliance, and preservation vs. contamination.

In more popular forms of tourism, there is likely to be a middle-ground, a mediated and formalized system of exchange designed to accommodate the interaction between tourist and host. Indeed, this middle-ground is often pejoratively labeled “touristic,” implying overly mediated or filtered and as such *inauthentic*. The worst thing a spiritual experience can be is inauthentic. The pilgrim-tourist is concerned with genuine experience, with an unfiltered and unmediated exchange (to such an extent that anything of this kind is actually possible).

At times, this genuine experience is not actually possible; at least not in the truest sense of the word. A pilgrim-tourist may encounter a hint of the genuine; something in close proximity to it, even. In most cases, that is enough. Still, the production of what the pilgrim-tourist is looking for requires an elaborate pretense, and in many cases a compromise between transparency and obfuscation¹⁷. At the same time, many pilgrim-tourists are unable or unwilling to fully engage the entire traditional mythos of a given pilgrimage. How many modern pilgrims walk an entire *Camino* across Western Europe? How many go on the

¹⁶ Christine Ballengee-Morris writes, “The history and growth of contemporary tourism is intertwined with the Industrial Revolution and the continued growth of technological advancements” (2002: 234). Ballengee-Morris, writing on tourism in West Virginia, points out that culture may be viewed as “a commercial product and/or as a geographic place,” and, “By methods of funding and institutional networking, the government determines what will be perpetuated and what is important. Institutional language is based on power, economics, and marketing rules” (236).

¹⁷ As Peter Probst writes that “the image works that stand in the [Osun] grove have never been ‘washed.’ For the priests, they are just ‘monuments.’ As such what they refer to is a different history, a different remembrance to the one the priests are interested in. In other words, the public they appeal to is different from the one the priests feel belonging to” (2004:48).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

dieta for the full term before imbibing Ayahuasca¹⁸? How many would subject themselves to the dangers and perils associated with pilgrimages in earlier ages of the world?

The most significant elements defining the contemporary pilgrim-tourist are individualism, consumerism, and the absence of indigenous spiritual practices in the immediate social group. Within certain religious frameworks there is at times no room for the more extreme varieties of spiritual practice and experience. The desire to break away from the perceived impositions of religious and/or social limitations often drives the pilgrim-tourist to seek alternatives, and whether coupled with simple curiosity or a deeper need, there must in any case be a sense that disparate elements of various spiritual traditions can be *experientially appropriated*¹⁹.

Pilgrim-tourists are interested in experiences; highly subjective and primarily psychological events that are nonetheless “real” on account of their connection to an event, location, and time. A spiritual experience in this context is a potentially transformative encounter with the divine or supernatural, often occurring within the boundaries of a space designated for that purpose and/or mediated by an individual or group of individuals qualified or empowered to direct the experience.

The experience is both psychological and cultural in the sense that it is rarely isolated, however personal it may be, from the traditions and narratives that frame it. It would be a mistake to presume that these experiences are entirely emotional; in fact, there is a prominent intellectual element, as well. Pilgrim-tourists may expect not only to feel differently following their journey, but to think differently, experiencing changes in perspective, perception, and awareness ranging in scale from drastic to subtle²⁰. They may expect to return with new energy and momentum added to their daily lives, and/or a new knowledge or understanding. Some may experience these drastic changes but for some

¹⁸ “Finding ayahuasca in Iquitos is not difficult,” Rich Doyle writes, “but the pilgrim/tourist who seeks the enlightenment of the yage way of knowledge has probably begun training well before the departure gate. Or should have. By all accounts, ayahuasca (a potent admixture of various DMT and Monoxidase Inhibitor containing plants found in the region) is hardly a recreational drink. Like other ecodelics, Ayahuasca can yield very different kinds of journeys, depending on the ‘set and setting’ of the tea drinker, including programming offered by curanderos in the form of Icaros...Anxious, even terrifying trips are not uncommon...The problem, the drinker discovers, is the *self*, which must give way on its attachments if it is to abide the massively consciousness induced by ayahuasca” (2005:8).

¹⁹ This point is made with respect to practitioners of contemporary Paganism by Charbonneau (2007): “Upon formulating their new beliefs and creating their spiritual identity, many Pagans tend to use the symbols and the mythologies of cultures with which they may feel the most affinity. Many will even attempt to reconstruct the pre-Christian religions of their favorite culture...Paganism is comparable to ethno-genesis, or the symbolic creation of an ethnic identity, albeit on a purely individual level” (16-18).

²⁰ Michael Winkelman, citing several respondents on why they sought Ayahuasca in the Amazon, records the following reasons, among others: “connect with mother nature and healing,” “become an evolved god...Ayahuasca is training to be a god,” “find something greater than myself, open my mind, dissolve boundaries, and expand awareness and consciousness,” “facilitate his development of spiritual mediumship,” and so on. “Their primary motivations,” Winkelman goes on to conclude, “were related to issues of spiritual experiences and personal spiritual development. The ideas of contact with a sacred nature, God, spirits and plant and natural energies” (2005:213-4).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

reason are unable to sustain or fully integrate them, suggesting that the experience can become less salient to the individual participant.

In seeking spiritual experiences, pilgrim-tourists gravitate toward specific paths or traditions that promise the genuine and authentic. They are drawn to find the greatest synergy between their imagining of the experience and the experience itself. The touch of the truly genuine is a touch of the Real, a way of breaking through the calcified and stagnant familiar into a place of immediacy and intimacy. This intimacy is necessary to the spiritual path; spirituality *must* be genuine, else it is no spirituality at all²¹.

In some cases, pilgrim-tourists may be specifically interested in indigenous religious and spiritual ceremonies that involve entheogenic flora (e.g. Ayahuasca, Peyote, etc.). They are, for a variety of individual reasons, seeking to dramatically (and temporarily) alter their consciousness²². Many tourists do not come from an environment where the use of psychotropic substances is condoned or acceptable; in fact, they are often quite illegal. Scheduled as drugs and stigmatized alongside opiates and narcotics, hallucinatory plants and fungi are not always associated with medicinal and spiritual qualities.

Consequently, inasmuch as they are a central feature of many traditional rituals, non-native participants must leap a few psychological and cultural hurdles before, during, and after their use of these tools. Not all of these associations are negative, however. For example, the West African psychotropic root *Iboga* is now used to treat substance addiction (known in that context as Ibogaine) rather than primarily as a sacrament used in traditional ceremony²³. This is not spiritual tourism, at least not evidently, but neither is it an entirely traditional means of employing the root according to its indigenous psychosocial context.

An individual may find that the symbols or iconography of an unfamiliar spirituality resonates with a belief, feeling, idea, or opinion that he/she holds closely. It may even be an artistic or intellectual attraction. Religion and spirituality, after all, also support

²¹ "All pilgrims," writes Collins-Kreiner, "religious or secular, share the trait of searching for a mystical or magico-religious experience—a moment when they experience something out of the ordinary that marks a transition from the mundane secular world of their everyday existence to a special and sacred state. These experiences can be described in various ways: transformation, enlightenment, life-changing events or conscious-changing events, but words seem inadequate to describe experiences that often are not amenable to reason" (2009:442-3).

²² Anja Loizaga-Velder writes, "The ayahuasca-induced modified state of consciousness can facilitate introspection, the processing of unconscious psychological material, and emotional catharsis. Traumatic life events that underlie individual psychopathology can be experientially relived from a new perspective and integrated in a functional way...Therapists and ritual participants alike referred to ayahuasca as an 'inner mirror' that allows individuals to readily accept previously denied aspects of the psyche" (2013:37).

²³ According to an article published by MAPS: "Typically, what someone feels after taking ibogaine is described as 'hitting a reset.' Ibogaine returns one's state to a pre-addiction modality, and provides a window of opportunity during which the chance to establish or re-establish control is once again present...Approximately half of the subjects gained an impressive level of introspection and insight into their behavior during the 'visionary phase' of their experience" (2003:19).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

philosophical perspectives, ways of looking at the world and interpreting human experience. Some of these perspectives may not be adequately represented by the faith systems immediately surrounding the individual²⁴. Highly individualized matrices of personal belief can be purely intellectual, but they do not generally command the same degree of influence and numinosity present in those that are experiential as well. There is more strength and support in a belief system validated by spiritual experience.

Many spiritual tourists undertake pilgrimages based on strong psychological and emotional associations with sites that situate a particular religious and/or spiritual mythology²⁵. Pilgrim-tourists may be hoping to validate their belief by connecting in an emotional way with the events that occurred at a particular location²⁶.

The space of interaction that circumscribes the pilgrim-tourist and his/her spiritual experience is a physical and mytho-symbolic space (e.g. a temple, church, grove, etc.) as well as a psychological space wherein a particular *work* takes place, be it communion/revelation, divination, healing, exorcism, etc. We speak of the individual, but it is important to remember that traditional spirituality is also a communal system of practice and belief, serving to unify a community under the auspices of a common mythology and continuum of interpretation. In this sense, spiritual experiences are intended to be shared, perpetuating a group narrative that is both history and mythology. The involvement of foreigners in that group narrative necessitates a radical adjustment; new barriers are created with varying degrees of permeability; new roles are allocated to mediate the interaction; new discourses congeal around the creation and communication of spiritual experiences.

Tourism is a type of traveling, at the most basic level involving a movement from a place of familiarity to an unfamiliar destination with an intention to experience an element or

²⁴ "The early nineteenth century," writes Christopher G. White, "was a time of religious experimentation, an era dominated by the spiritual yearnings of believers alienated by their parents' Calvinism...Probably the most pervasive solution to the perceived coldness of Calvinism was religious revival, which, in this period, gathered explosive force and both a movement for religious renewal and a forceful critique of inherited tradition...But revivals also were destabilizing events, and revived believers could do unpredictable things" (2006:228-9).

²⁵ Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood write: "This desire for an affective connection with an earlier time is termed 'numen-seeking.' Numen, in its Latin etymology, translates as a nod or beckoning from the gods. Its first modern usage in the work of Rudolf Otto...who describes it as a religious emotion or experience awakened in the presence of something holy...Some people make a personal connection with a site that may be manifest as a deep engagement, empathy, or spiritual communion with the people or events of the past" ("Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past" 2003:57).

²⁶ Kathryn Rountree, writing on Goddess-based pilgrimages, points out that the "valued ideals embodied in ancient pagan temple sites are *religious* for the Goddess pilgrims who visit such sites (but not necessarily for other tourists) in the sense that these sites were once designated shrines of deities—deities who are being revived and reinvested with sacred meaning and power by contemporary neo-Pagans...The valued ideals vested in Goddess pilgrimage sites are also *cultural*, because they pertain to a sub-group within contemporary Western feminism and have symbolic value within that culture" (2002:482).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

feature of that destination that is characteristic, unique, or authentic²⁷. The tourist also *returns*; perhaps changed or transformed by the experience, but he/she returns nonetheless²⁸. The tourist then mythologizes the experience, rendering it into a narrative both memorable and possibly communicable.

Spiritual tourism began with tourism in general—that is, traveling for purposes related to enjoyment or knowledge rather than at the behest of a government or other institution. The accessibility of formerly remote destinations opened an entire world to the general public, formerly unreachable save only to a select few (i.e. explorers, missionaries, soldiers, etc.). The logistics of world travel in earlier eras limited the possibility of spiritual tourism to a relatively small number of people. Instead, those who could access regions where indigenous spiritualities were active and vibrant returned with narratives and objects that were fetishized, romanticized, and subjected to overpowering psycho-cultural processes that deeply affected—and largely in a negative way—the future interactions between disparate peoples.

Earlier paradigms of travel were more immersive, in the sense that a journey to a foreign destination involved a commitment of time, fortitude, and courage. The many miles of tossing water, dense jungles, shadowed forests, and craggy peaks effectively removed the individual from home shores more completely than a flight of a few hours—not to mention the fact that it was not so simple to change one’s mind and return home. One was enfolded and often consumed by the foreignness of a place and people, particularly if relatively little was known about it. A few sketches, stamps, and stolen artifacts only whetted the popular imagination, engendering a frenzy of fantasies that cloaked a foreign land in connotations, images, and ideas that have lingered even unto the present day.

Pilgrim-tourists are the modern inheritors of these associations. These archetypal images embed themselves in the psyche, ghosts and echoes that create *a priori* narratives into which the individual attempts to insert himself or herself. These narratives provide the impetus to undertake the journey, the lure of Otherness that promises to satisfy what the Self cannot—save that this Otherness is itself a fabrication of the individual psyche to begin with. Still, the tourism industry is reciprocal: travelers must be enticed by what they believe they are likely to find or experience, and those who do obtain these experiences are

²⁷ Ballengee-Morris writes, “Art that is marketed for tourist consumption is often judged according to a perspective to determine authenticity. When art is commodified, it adheres to marketing rules and, in the case of tourist art, the consumer’s expectations figure into the artistic process...When the culture and the art change, the original characteristics are no longer applicable. If the characteristics are kept in place, stereotypes develop. The exceptions are determined to be inauthentic because they do not satisfy the stereotype that has become the deciding criteria” (2002:241).

²⁸ “Modern tourism is regarded as one of the newer phenomena in the world but, turning to its origins, we see that it is rooted in pilgrimage to ancient sites of sacred repute...the term ‘pilgrimage’ connotes a religious journey [and] its derivation from the Latin, *peregrinus* allows broader interpretations, including foreigner, wanderer, exile, and traveler, as well as newcomer and stranger. The term ‘tourist’ also has Latin origins, namely *tornus*, one who makes a circular journey, usually for pleasure, and returns to the starting point...In the globalizing world, pilgrimage has become an important product for the tourism industry” (Iheanacho 2015:268-270).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

expected to perpetuate these associations in order for the industry to thrive and survive²⁹. There are countless spiritual traditions that have perished, the same way languages daily perish, dwindling into disuse and obscured by modernity. This is not to say that all living spiritual traditions practiced by cultures around the globe are touristic—which is to say partly inauthentic—but that living spiritual traditions are adaptable and willing to create narrative subsystems and cultural spaces designed to accommodate this market³⁰.

In previous centuries, the traveler returning after an extended voyage to a foreign land was a sensation. Now, although a pilgrim-tourist returning from a far-flung corner of the world may be greeted with an excitable host of friends eager to hear about the trip and see pictures, he/she is one of many travelers, her/his story one of many stories. His/her experiences are consequently more personal (even despite the current prevalence of social networking options) and do not often extend beyond the immediate sphere of his/her social group. This naturally allows modern travelers to treat their experiences more personally than representatively³¹. The spiritual momentum is individualized, interpreted within the parameters of that perspective, and possibly disseminated—creating secondary narratives and interpretations that potentially magnify the appeal of such experiences.

Spiritual tourism suggests a movement away from traditional paradigms of spiritual practice and toward a popularization, globalization, and commercialization of spirituality that may see the increase of a culture of appropriation. How many trips to Haiti does it take before one is an insider to the spiritual culture of those who serve the Lwa? How many visits to Oshogbo before one is an insider among the priests of Osun? How many nights in an ashram until one attains samadhi?

In the contemporary world, those who are sufficiently interested can delve into disparate spiritual traditions without having received the invitation of an authorized practitioner.

²⁹ “This generating of tourists’ interest and desires through marketing of indigenous spirituality has, in the current political context, some wider implications...Several researchers point out challenges associated with this type of identity construction that takes shape within the framework of a global tourism industry where power relationships are played out and cultural identities contested. It is argued that the creation of an indigenous spiritual identity in a tourism context contributes to a geopolitical discourse that opens for the aestheticization, exotification, or even musealization of indigenous cultures...However, in this cultivation of the ‘non-Western other,’ ‘they’ are always expected to live up to the image ‘we’ create of them; in this case as bearers of traditional knowledge or wisdom, as spiritual advisors, and as men and women living in harmony with nature and each other” (Fonneland 2013:204).

³⁰ “A Guarani community,” Ballengee-Morris writes, “near Sao Vicente in the Atlantic Rain Forest is still located close to their ancestral lands. Because they are still connected to place, their materials are closely related to their heritage; yet, they chosen to make a division between what they sell to tourists and what they personally use everyday and for rituals...Opening their reservation to outsiders, by policy or physically, is an extension of colonialism through the development of a tourist industry” (2002:239-40).

³¹ “For those who perceived themselves either as tourists or pilgrims, their main reasons for visiting the Holy Land were specified as being personal and religious...The major reasons mentioned were ‘to get to know the Bible,’... ‘to strengthen my belief’... ‘I did not come for a vacation, but to know Jesus’ land’; ‘to make the Bible live’; and ‘to understand things from my heart.’ Most of the reasons pointed to personal motives, strongly tied to religion, and a wish to understand one’s spiritual inner being” (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2000:60).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

While access to the truly esoteric remains limited to those who do actively seek out admittance into a living tradition, there is nonetheless an abundance of translated and printed texts that provide a wealth of information that may allow eclectic spiritualists to build entirely individualized practices.

Like information on the Internet, it is up to the reader to organize and interpret the data, assess its validity and authenticity, and apply it—but while one can learn basic chemistry, or attain fluency in another language, or learn to build any number of things, it is a different matter when one interested in spirituality attempts to practice a discipline on his or her own without proper guidance. Without guidance from an authorized practitioner, the transformative properties of the spiritual practice cannot be unlocked. One can read all the Sufi books in the library, or practice all the *mudras* illustrated by diligent recorders, and yet never receive the spiritual gifts one would under the tutelage of a master³².

Ultimately, spiritual traditions have their own requisites, and the task of differentiating between the insider and outsider is left to the keepers of the tradition. There is, however, the danger that elements of these traditions can be packaged and commercialized, or that pilgrim-tourists may have neither the intention nor the ability to fully respect or appreciate the conditions that attend even this level of exposure to the sacred. This does not necessarily imply that pilgrim-tourists are by default insincere; only that their sincerity is filtered through the limitations of their ability to actually pursue the paths potentially opened by their spiritual experiences.

This is but one of the challenges attending spiritual tourism. Others may be more familiar, particularly those that involve appropriation (unintentional or deliberate), exploitation, and those that stir the revenants of colonialism. Pilgrim-tourists may be blissfully unaware of the implications and consequences of their presence, particularly in developing countries or regions where indigenous peoples and tribes endure economic hardship, isolation, and/or ethnic tensions³³.

³² Probst writes that when the priests of Osun are asked whether the decorative sculptures around the Osogbo grove are legitimately sacral, “they get angry. Ritual objects, they stress, are secret. Not everybody can see them, and if people can see them, then only on certain occasions....In addition, they say, and more importantly, to serve a ritual function it would have been necessary ‘to wash’ the works...The aim of these activities is to imbue the object or person with the energy of the deity” (2004:47). Similarly, while an individual and look up South American *icaros* and learn to chant them, authorized practitioners in the Peruvian Amazon receive these musical incantations as part of a “package” that includes the power necessary to use the “medicine.” Without the complete package, the songs cannot be used in a ritual context (personal communication 2016).

³³ Shane Greene writes that “recent controversies reveal that contemporary indigenous spokespeople and representative organizations are negotiating their role as mediators and representatives of indigenous collectivities with a whole host of other nonindigenous peoples and organizations specific to this historical moment...many point to the pitfalls of seeing indigenous peoples as inherently environmentally conservative and thus stereotyped as ‘ecologically noble savages’...Indigenous representatives increasingly speak about their distinct cultures as objects around which political struggle is organized in their efforts to negotiate the legacies of colonial occupation, incorporation into modern national projects, and the pressures of globalization” (2004:212).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

The choices that an indigenous people make regarding how to market a spiritual resource and perhaps mitigate the effects of desecralization may go largely unnoticed by pilgrim-tourists. This is not always the case, however; many pilgrim-tourists may be *hyperconscious* of this effect, in part because it may occlude the authenticity of the experiences they seek. In either case, the spiritual experience is projected into a mediated space set aside for this interaction³⁴. These spaces may be created spontaneously—in cases where there is no developed tourism apparatus—or they may be created purposefully and with varying levels of transparency and accessibility.

Pilgrim-tourists are by no means identical to one another; however, their designation implies a range of fairly similar motives. It is the extent to which their motives are both *conscious* and *informed* that is significant. “Conscious” may be taken to mean “mindful and aware”—good advice for any traveler in any foreign country, and most assuredly for those in search of powerful spiritual experiences³⁵. It may seem that the host culture is in “control” of the experience, and consequently in a position to moderate or palliate the impact of spiritual tourism. In cases where the apparatus is more developed, this may be entirely the case. However, where intense spiritual experiences are involved, there is an element of unpredictability that stems from the *intrusion of the sacred into the space of exchange*.

It may be that some pilgrim-tourists exacerbate the desecralization of pilgrimage sites, normally on account of ignorance (ill-will is exceedingly rare). It may be that possible misrepresentations and/or misinterpretations may incite the creation and dissemination of ideas that do not properly represent or signify the original traditions. Pilgrim-tourists are not always frivolous or unmindful in their experimentations. Many are intellectual and artistic, well-informed and generally able to appreciate the significance of the interactions taking place³⁶.

³⁴ “Many of the items sold by FUNAI [Fundacao Nacional do Indio] are made by the people, but the objects do not have cultural or historical significance. This issue is not who made it or should the objects be culturally authentic, but whether the consumer should be informed about differences between the objects they buy and what they assume they are buying?” (2002:238). Ballengee-Morris is talking objects here, and the matter is somewhat different when a sacred entity and/or substance is introduced. The sacred then becomes a part of this mediated environment, still sacral in nature, and able to influence the exchange accordingly. However, in this case the questions becomes doubly important to ask—and also in cases where it is not an object but an experience.

³⁵ “Following Durkheim,” writes Guillermo Salas Carreno, referring to the pilgrimage to the shrine of Taytacha Quyllurit’l in Peru “this overwhelming experience can be seen as socially constructed by the attendance of each and every person at the pilgrimage. The extraordinary congregation of the diverse people present in the shrine becomes in itself an index of the power that resides there. The number of people performing in diverse ways, at the same time, in the convergence of the crosses from the glacier toward the church is so impressive that the actual sensorial experience of something extraordinary taking place could not but be real” (2014:S193-4).

³⁶ Michael Winkelman points out that, “While it may be easy to dismiss Westerners who seek such experiences as drug dilettantes, their own motivations for participation in these experiences and the personal outcomes suggest very different orientations. These include forms of cultural therapy and spiritual quest, aspects of the effects of these substances found in their use throughout the world...These experiences point to transpersonal concerns in general as the

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

Still, there is no way to control the outflow of information, and the unregulated dissemination of knowledge creates a possible relationship of supply and demand that may further open sites of pilgrimage to unexpected or untenable levels of traffic. It is also possible that the interactions that take place within the context of pilgrim-tourism may add impetus to the adaptive processes that serve to preserve continuums of experience and meaning. In these cases, meaning is layered, with each type of interpretation adding another dimension of experience to a site, object, event, or movement³⁷. Pilgrim-tourism takes place on social, political, and cultural levels, and the actions of the pilgrim-tourists and their hosts have far-reaching consequences.

Pilgrim-tourists are often are privileged in the luxury of eclecticism³⁸, and this is important because they can effect change. At the most basic level, they facilitate the commercialization of spirituality and create spaces of exchange that are potentially disruptive *and* creative³⁹. Creatively, the interactions facilitated by spiritual tourism allow for more comfortable dialogues than before. Colonialism, imperialism, slavery, and tyranny fostered a very different field of discourse, where syncretism was adopted for purposes of survival rather than as a matter of choice or natural adaptation.

motivations, patterns clearly attested to in the responses to the perceived benefits of the activity, which were characterized as increased self-awareness, insights into one's life, and access to deeper levels on the self" (2005:214).

³⁷ Carreno goes on to say that "both the ideal extremes—the urban monolingual Spanish speaker and rural monolingual Quecha speaker—live within worlds that inevitably include elements from the other. This is also the case for the New Age pilgrims, who, by their attempts to purify the pilgrimage from Catholic symbols and practices, keep pointing out their undesired presence. Between these ideal poles lies the vast majority of Cuzco's population, which has different types of familiarity and command of the semiotic forms coming from different traditions but has been in continued yet hierarchically laden dialogues for several centuries. The diversity of Cuzqueno pilgrims, regardless of their way of framing the purpose of going to the pilgrimage, engages both with the powers of the living landscape and with the Catholic idiom of devotional penance...This type of copresence cannot be reduced to a third hybrid synthesis, such as one conveyed by the notion of syncretism. While these different worlds appear within each other and are interpreted through different assumptions about the nature of the world, they remain distinct" (2014:S210).

³⁸ Kathryn Rountree writes: "Sharing the middle-class tourist's attraction to 'heritage,' Goddess pilgrims are part of what Edgar (1987) terms the 'era of pastiche and nostalgia.' However, I do not think that Goddess pilgrims can be described accurately as 'post-tourists'—those who acknowledge the 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell 1999) of many 'traditional' tourist attractions but delight in them nonetheless, knowing that 'there is no authentic tourist experience' (Urry 1995:140). The devotees of Goddess spirituality may readily admit that their modern Paganism involves much borrowing and pastiche, but they are deeply serious about their belief in the sacred energy connected with ancient Pagan temple sites, and equally serious about their experiences of this energy" (2002:479).

³⁹ Noga Collins-Kreiner, considering Turner's contribution to the concept of the pilgrimage, writes that "another of Turner's fundamental ideas is that pilgrimage centres are typically located 'out there.' This peripherality is geographic, but more than that it is symbolic and cultural; the sites are marginal to population centres, and indeed the sociopolitical centres of society. These peripheral centres are often located beyond a stretch of wilderness or some other uninhabited territory, in the 'chaos' surrounding the ordered 'cosmicised' social world...The detachment from everyday life...places [the pilgrim] in a milieu where he or she is often more open to new experiences, ready and willing to meet new people, hear new things, and reconsider some of his or her unquestioned assumptions" (2009:439).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

Colonialism and imperialism haunt many sites of contemporary spiritual pilgrimage throughout the developing world. In developed countries, ethnic groups that are involved in the commercialization of their spiritual traditions are confronted with a host of challenges—psychological, economic, social—that influence the expression and vitality of living beliefs and practices. In the past, the barriers of time, distance, and Otherness allowed for the protection and preservation of rituals and sites. The counter-pressure in the preindustrial age came in part from the allure of the strange and the popularization of spectacles and cultural artifacts; headdresses and other ritual objects from indigenous American peoples; masks and fetishes from the “Dark Continent” of Africa; Orientalist fantasies of the Middle East and Asia.

There are numerous accounts of travelers “going native,” both fictional and historical, creating and reinforcing a fantasy of immersion and transformation⁴⁰. One finds expressions of this fantasy throughout literature and film, from *Tarzan* to *Avatar*. However, going native implies the irrevocable; there is no going back. In contrast, the pilgrim-tourist may play at going native for the duration of his/her trip, but this temporary garb may be sloughed off in ways impossible for the individual of an earlier era, utterly transformed by the journey. When God becomes too familiar, the possibility of spiritual transformation diminishes. There is an altogether different kind of fear associated with the unfamiliar: the fear that what lies in the unknown will prove too dangerous and too difficult to overcome. The God of the unknown is not the God of hearth and home, and one finds different deities altogether amongst foreign peoples.

The unknown holds possibility as well as danger, and the two are often proportionate to one another. The more dangerous the endeavor, the more likely the experience will provide the catalyst necessary to spiritual progress. For example: in the series of books written by Carlos Castaneda concerning his apprenticeship under Don Juan Matus, there is a recurrent theme of danger and risk. If the student deviates from his instruction, or mishandles the allies, or succumbs to the temptation of power, there is the risk that he will be irrecoverably lost.

In contrast, if his apprenticeship is successful, vistas of spiritual growth will be opened to him, a triumph commensurate to the often-dark struggle of his Path of Heart⁴¹. Similarly, an

⁴⁰ Consider, for example, one of the world’s most familiar and extreme fictional accounts of “going native”: Joseph Conrad’s controversial *Heart of Darkness*. The character Kurtz was no tourist, to be sure; and while Conrad’s narrative—told from an observer’s perspective—was challenged as a misrepresentation by Nigeria’s own Chinua Achebe, one should not forget that the narrator is more properly the tourist, limited by his own experience, understanding, and more importantly, by his return to England. Kurtz could not be separated from the place; he was so completely transformed that his physical removal both revealed and forever obscured the incomprehensible vistas of foreign power that his immersion opened to him. He could no more divorce himself from his experience of the Congo than the man could remove his own skin.

⁴¹ Castaneda’s controversial series of popular books begins with the allegedly ethnographical *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, published in 1968, and continues into increasingly fantastical territory with *A Separate Reality* (1971), *Journey to Ixtlan* (1972), *Tales of Power* (1974), *The Second Ring of Power* (1977), *The Eagle’s Gift* (1981), *The Fire From Within* (1984), and *The Power of Silence* (1987). The books claim to chronicle the narrator’s interactions

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

Ifa priest will inform the initiate that to abuse the power of the Orishas may well be fatal, and that if he or she should misuse that power to cause harm, that harm will be visited threefold on him⁴². Shamanism and mysticism are both filled with injunctions of this kind, and they almost always occur on the threshold between the familiar and unfamiliar.

One can buy the ingredients necessary to brew a shamanic drink, print out sheets of songs and incantations in native languages, and attempt to recreate a spiritual experience, but there is the lingering doubt that to so completely separate an experience from the contexts of place and culture would be to fabricate a hollow and ineffectual simulacrum⁴³. Moreover, while there are many traditions that have been transplanted to foreign soil (one can find Sufis, medicine-men, and pagans of all creeds in the United States), there is nonetheless the sense that a pilgrimage of sorts is necessary for a greater degree of authenticity. Like any consumer, the spiritual tourist demands that his or her experience be provided by a legitimate source. A common expectation is that the shaman or practitioner be the representative of an ancient lineage, successfully transmitted from one apprentice to the next⁴⁴.

Fighting for its own survival, a belief system has limited choices, and may often assume several different postures depending on its versatility and the willingness of its practitioners. One finds Muslim devotees of Osun, and the quintessential Great Mother of the Yoruba is often represented as the Madonna. She has many faces and many paths, many

with a Yaqui sorcerer named Don Juan Matus from 1960 through 1973. Since their publication, the authenticity of Castaneda's characters and the substance of the teachings presented in his books has since been called into serious question as entirely fictive. Nonetheless, Castaneda's series continues to be quite popular even today in many neo-shamanic circles.

⁴² (Personal communication, Ile-Ifé, Nigeria, 2012). On this occasion, the *babalawo* told a story of a man who went to the priests of the mischievous Orisha Ésu, looking to see whether he could lay a curse on an individual whom he believed had stolen something from him. The priests indicated that he should not call upon Ésu until he was certain that this individual had indeed committed the offense. The supplicant did not listen, so convinced he was that his target had done this thing. He called upon Ésu, observing the proper rites, and demanded that the Orisha slay his enemy within an allotted period. When this period of several days had elapsed, Ésu struck down the man who had summoned him. As it turned out, the man's target had been innocent of the theft.

⁴³ If you speak to an individual who tried Ayahuasca at home, for example, you will find his or her description of the experience likely very different than the one who journeyed down to Peru and participated in a tour centered on the preparation and consumption of the drink, as well as on the guidance of an individual trained in its use and spiritual application. Both experiences may be considered inauthentic compared to the models they emulate, but there is little doubt that, between them, one is considerably more genuine than the other (personal communication, 2014).

⁴⁴ "In a tourism context...the local affiliation must appear stronger than the global in order to have market value. Here, the founders of Sami Tour strongly object to the New Age market principle in which spirituality can be communicated and consumed by everyone, regardless of local and ethnic affiliation. [It is] emphasized that the promotion of secular as well as religious symbols must be managed by Sámi entrepreneurs" (Fonneland 2013:203).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

dresses and guises, and yet retains certain essential characteristics that are as applicable in Brazil or Cuba as in Nigeria⁴⁵.

The *experience* of Osun, or any of the other Orishas, is possible on both sides of the Atlantic, and moreover, available not only to those directly related to her culture of origin, but to those of foreign and mixed origin in every corner of the world. A white man or woman may be initiated by a priest of the deity, and while his or her loyalty may be questioned by others, it is presumed that an initiate would possess the knowledge necessary to defend his or her authority—to prove that he or she is an insider. What else would such an individual be? A false practitioner, an outsider posing as an intimate, an infiltrator with ulterior motives...or a tourist.

Conclusion

The intrinsic ability of spirituality to cross both psychological and cultural boundaries also makes it vulnerable to removal from its original context and expression in other mediums. These expressions, transposed from the sacred to the profane, nonetheless recall their origin and create a secondary matrix of symbolism that is more visible and accessible to the outsider. However, unlike the primary matrix of practice, which is often highly regulated by the practitioners, this secondary one represents new kind of boundary between the sacred and profane.

This boundary inverts the relationship between the Self and Other: on the one hand, the foreigner is accepted into a dialogue with the sacred, mediated by the host culture. There are numerous processes embedded in this exchange, including translation, interpretation, and representation, as well as those are considered undesirable, including appropriation, misrepresentation, and fetishization⁴⁶. On the other hand, the host culture must come to terms with this paradigm and take the necessary steps to negotiate the creation and maintenance of this arena.

In a pluralistic model, the discourse of religious and spiritual exchange allows for the birth of new paradigms that demonstrate the adaptability of symbolic and mythic languages. Free from the oppressive circumstances of forced syncretism and compromise, this new

⁴⁵ “Most often Osun is characterized as a water or fertility deity, but the notions associated with Osun are much wider, embracing equally images of healing, femininity, motherhood, sexuality, wealth, wisdom, knowledge, beauty, art, and power. In fact, Osun has different identities, resulting from the various conditions under which people have lent meaning to her” (Probst 2004:36).

⁴⁶ Ieda Machado Ribeiro dos Santos writes concerning the Afro-Brazilian spiritual traditions of Bahia: “Presently, the problem is that *Condomblé* priests and priestesses have to face is totally different from what they had in the past, but a problem nonetheless. Since anthropologists, artists, and intellectuals showed to the ‘white’ side of our society the beauty of *Condomblé* music, dance, and mythology, the abusive use of this beauty has become the new problem with which *Condomblé* priests and priestesses have to deal. Artistic and folkloric groups often stage scenes that should be restricted to the intimacy of the *terreiros*. Even carnival groups with the political purpose of defending Negritude values sometimes make this mistake and parade persons wearing *orixas’* costumes” (2001:75).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

model is based more on experimentation than necessity. This experimentation, however, is highly subjective, in the sense that it is principally based on “what works” for the individual or group.

There are consequences to these varied formulations; they anticipate a space of pure plurality where spiritual experiences, or “hierophanies,”⁴⁷ are available to all practitioners. It may also have a contrary effect, creating additional tensions between those who do appropriate disparate belief systems, those who commercialize (whether intentionally or unintentionally) spiritual traditions, and those who are responsible for safeguarding the integrity of religious and spiritual disciplines.

The heart and focus of the matter is ultimately on the spiritual experience itself; whether it is the presence of God in a Christian church or Muslim mosque, the ineffability of timeless awareness in a Himalayan temple, or the esoteric vitality hidden in the jungles and woodlands of the world. While this experience is wrapped and veiled by the cultural set and setting that it enters—whether an individual, group, or larger collective—the spiritual experience itself *is* a universal phenomenon⁴⁸. Its effects are comparable across the world, and while in some cases the means of access are hoarded or insulated against cross-social or cross-cultural exchange, the marketplace of spiritual tourism is sustained by and thrives on the universality of these experiences.

Progressives and conservatives, militant fundamentalists and pacifist ascetics all lay claim to the transformative potential of spiritual experiences. Shared experiences can bind collectives together, and when interpreted and represented consistently, they serve as the experiential foundations of entire systems of belief and practice. They can also be shared cross culturally, facilitated by a marketplace of exchange that can preserve and adapt, perpetuate and accommodate new modes of transformation. There are attendant dangers, many of which are yet unknown; but spiritual tourism, though burdened with the implications of profit, commodification, and commercialization, nonetheless affords the opportunity to create regulated spaces where the generation of narratives may be guided by those willing to safeguard the integrity of the traditions, practices, and mythologies that surround, represent, and carry one to the threshold between the universally human and the elusive spiritual other.

⁴⁷ “Religious symbols, says Mircea Eliade, are representations of ‘hierophanies,’ experiences of the ‘irruption’ of another reality into our own (Eliade 1958). They are understood to stand between the divine world and ours and so are ambivalent, radiating the power of the fission of sacred and profane” (Murphy 2001:96).

⁴⁸ Carreno writes, “Pilgrimages, due to their particular characteristics, are prone to the coexistence and reproduction of different interpretations regarding the nature of the transcendence to be found in them. These multiple interpretations are allowed and even promoted by the strong emotional experiences present in them. While collective effervescence is associated with the experience of transcendence, the diversity of interpretations about it is facilitated by the extraordinary quality of the experience. Collective effervescence can paradoxically promote feelings of social solidarity that are, however, not necessarily homogenous. Quecha pilgrims and Catholic priests have different interpretations of the rituals as long as there is no conflict among them” (2014:S211).

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

Works Cited

- Ballengee-Morris, Christine. "Cultures for Sale: Perspectives on Colonialism and Self-Determination and the Relationship to Authenticity and Tourism." *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 43,3. 2002, pp. 232-245
- Bleie, Tone. "Pilgrim Tourism in the Central Himalayas: The Case of Manakamana Temple in Gorkha, Nepal." *Mountain Research and Development*. Vol. 23:2, 2003, pp. 177-184
- Cameron, Catherine M. and Gatewood, John B. "Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past." *Ethnology*, Vol. 42:1, 2003, pp. 55-71.
- Carreno, Guillermo Salas. "The Glacier, the Rock, the Image: Emotional Experience and Semiotic Diversity at the Quyllurit'i Pilgrimage (Cuzco, Peru)." *Signs and Society*. Vol. 2.S1, 2014, pp. S188-S214
- Charbonneau, Marisol. "The Melting Cauldron: Ethnicity, Diversity, and Identity in a Contemporary Pagan Subculture." *The Pomegranate*, Vol. 9,1, 2007, pp. 5-21
- Colline-Kreiner, Noga. "Geographers and Pilgrimages: Changing Concepts in Pilgrimage Tourism Research." *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*. Vol. 101:4, 2009, pp. 437-448
- Collins-Kreider, N., Kilt, N. "Pilgrimage Tourism in the Holy Land: The behavioral characteristics of Christian pilgrims." *Geocorona*. Vol. 50:1, 2000, pp. 55-67
- DeTemple, Jill. "'Haiti Appeared at My Church': Faith-Based Organizations, Transnational Activism, and Tourism in Sustainable Development." *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*. Vol. 35, no. 2/3, 2006, pp. 155-181
- Doyle, Rick. "Divining Ayahuasca." *Discourse*. Vol. 27.1, 2005, pp. 6-33
- Fonneland, Trude A. "Sami Tourism and the Signposting of Spirituality. The Case of Sami Tour: A Spiritual Entrepreneur in the Contemporary Experience Economy." *Acta Borealia*. Vol. 30:2, 2013, pp. 190-208
- Greene, Shane. "Indigenous People Incorporated? Culture as Politics, Culture as Property in Pharmaceutical Bioprospecting." *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 45.2, 2004, pp. 211-237
- "Ibogaine: Treatment Outcomes and Observations." *MAPS*, vol. 13,2. 2003, pp. 16-21
- Iheanacho, Ngozi N. "Nigerian Praxis of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Motivations in the Globalizing World." *Ciencias da Religiao: historia e sociedade*. Vol. 13:1, 2015, pp. 259-284
- Loizaga-Velder, Anje. "A Psychotherapeutic View on the Therapeutic Effects of Ritual Ayahuasca Use in the Treatment of Addiction." *Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies*. 2013

Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience

Murphy, Joseph F., "Yéyé Cachita: Ochun in a Cuban Mirror" *Osun Across the Waters*, ed. By Joseph F. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford. Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2001, pp. 87-102

O'Conner, Paul. "Hong Kong Muslims on Hajj: Rhythms of the Pilgrimage 2.0 and Experiences of Spirituality Among Twenty-First Century Global Cities." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. Vol. 34:3, 2013, pp. 315-329

Probst, Peter. "Keeping the Goddess Alive: Performing Culture and Remembering the Past in Osogbo, Nigeria." *Social Analysis*. Vol. 48:1, 2004, pp. 33-54

Ribeiro dos Santos, Ieda Machado. "Nesta Cidade Todo Mundo é d'Oxum" *Osun Across the Waters*, ed. By Joseph M. Murphy & Mei-Mei Sanford. Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2001, pp. 68-84

Rountree, Kathryn. "Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists: Inscribing the Body Through Sacred Travel." *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 63, 4, 2002, pp. 475-496

Taylor, Robin M. "Holy Movement and Holy Place: Christian Pilgrimage and the Hajj." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*. Vol. 50:3, pp. 262-272

White, Christopher G. "Minds Intensely Unsettled: Phrenology, Experience, and the American Pursuit of Spiritual Assurance, 1830-1880." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*. Vol. 16.2, 2006, pp. 227-261

Winkelman, Michael. "Drug Tourism or Spiritual Healing? Ayahuasca Seekers in Amazonia." *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*. Vol. 37:2, 2005, pp. 209-218