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Pilgrimage: Communitas and contestation, unity and difference - An introduction

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Abstract

In this introduction to Tourism's special issue, 'Pilgrimage: Communitas and Contestation, Unity and Difference,' guest editor Michael A. Di Giovine explores the intellectual history of the anthropological theory of communitas — which Victor Turner has argued is a foundational element of pilgrimage — and its broader application to tourism research. Communitas denotes a spontaneous sensation of mutual communication and unity that arises among pilgrims, which transcends the quotidian markers of social structure, such as class, status, education, employment, or political affiliations. While the theory has proven to be foundational in the social scientific study of pilgrimage and, later, (secular) tourism, it was also met with criticism, particularly in John Eade and Michael Sallnow's volume, Contesting the Sacred. Arguing that the analytical discrepancy between those who find communitas in pilgrimage and those who find contestation is predominantly based on one's view of the social structure of pilgrimage/tourism itself, the author posits an alternative model, the field of touristic production. In addition to referencing this issue's interdisciplinary papers, the author illustrates his model of pilgrimage through recourse to his ethnographic fieldwork at the Italian shrine of contemporary Catholic saint and stigmatic, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina.

***Key words**:
pilgrimage; communitas; contestation; field of production; Padre Pio of Pietrelcina*

Introduction

This special issue of *Tourism: An International, Interdisciplinary Journal* explores one of the most perduring, and problematic, concepts in the social scientific study of pilgrimage: that pilgrimage, as a special form of modern, global mobility that we call tourism, by its very nature fosters among its practitioners a sense of unity that transcends the diversity of their places of origin, status, politics, education, wealth, or other markers of societal division — in a word, '*communitas*.' This term may not be familiar to all tourism practitioners, or even to all theologians (cf. Starkloff, 1997), but it has significantly shaped the ways in which anthropologists and other social scientists have analyzed the structure, function, and meaning-making practices of pilgrimage.

Coined by the symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner, *communitas* denotes a strong sense of unity among ritual participants that transcends the daily differences of their social life, a spontaneous and 'sympathetic' sensation of mutual 'fellow-feeling,' to use

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M. A. Di Giovine
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247

Adam Smith's terms (2000, p. 241). In his work on pilgrimage (Turner, 1973, 1974c, 1974d), which culminated in the publication of *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* with his wife Edith Turner (1978), Turner furthermore argued that this sensation of unity is a pilgrim's fundamental motivation for undertaking what often is an arduous and taxing pilgrimage journey. Likewise, fostering such a sensation is often a central concern for religious site managers in their desire to actualize their religion's claims to universalism (see Eade & Sallnow, 2000, p. 4). Turner also proposed that communitas comes in three processual forms or phases: *existential communitas,* the spontaneous feeling of mutual communion among pilgrims; *normative communitas,* an institutionalized form of communitas that is the product of co-option by groups within the social structure (the Catholic Mass would fall within this category, as well as more structured pilgrimages planned by religious groups); and *ideological communitas,* which amounts to the discourses, exhortations, and utopian models that often provide the basis and impetus for normative communitas (1969, pp. 131-140).

Turner and Turner's watershed volume was met with accolades, and has significantly shaped subsequent research on pilgrimage (Bowman, 1988, p. 21; Coleman & Elsner, 1991, p. 64; Coleman & Eade, 2004, p. 1). Yet it was also subject to criticism as some researchers saw not communitas in pilgrimages, but conflict and contestation. These critiques were synthesized in John Eade and the late Michael Sallnow's volume, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* ([1991] 2000). Arguing that Christian pilgrimage, far from producing unity among different social groups, was actually based on, and constructed through, acts of contestation, Eade and Sallnow posited an alternative theory of pilgrimage as a realm of competing discourses (2000, p. 5). At a deeper level, their volume also successfully attempted to break the hegemony of Turner's theory on the social scientific study of pilgrimage, which seemed to have stymied the advancement of pilgrimage studies as a serious and dynamic field within anthropology (cf. Coleman & Eade, 2004, pp. 3-4). Like Turner and Turner's volume before them, Eade and Sallnow's 'new agenda in pilgrimage studies' (2000, p. 2) was met warmly; it spurred on pilgrimage studies beyond anthropology (Clift & Clift, 1996; Vukonić, 1996; Swatos & Tomasi, 2002; Timothy & Olsen, 2006), and beyond its traditional religious focus (Morinis, 1992; Reader & Walter, 1993; Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Margry, 2008), and remains a canonical text for those researching pilgrimage and religious tourism, particularly in the Western, Christian tradition.

Lest it seem that this debate between communitas and contestation is relegated solely to pilgrimage studies or anthropology departments, it should be noted that it has informed contemporary tourism research, as well. Prior to the publication of Turner and Turner's text, Nelson Graburn argued that tourism is a 'sacred journey' (1977) and a 'secular ritual' (2001) that shares with pilgrimage a similar ritual structure, which for Turner is important for the production of communitas. Building on his mentor Sir Edmund Leach's work on ritual and temporality (Leach, 2004 [1961]) Graburn (1983) also points out a number of other common links between the two — a point that the Turners echo in their oft-repeated phrase, 'a pilgrim is half a tourist if a tourist is half a pilgrim' (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 20). Indeed, it is difficult to categori-

ze visitors at a destination — religious or not — despite frequent attempts by academics and practitioners to do so (Pfaffenberger, 1983; Adler, 1989, 2002; Badone & Roseman, 2004; Sharpley, 2009; Stausberg, 2011; cf. Cohen, 1979; Nolan & Nolan, 1989; Eade, 1992; Rinschede, 1992; De Sousa, 1993; Bauman, 1996; Poira, Butler & Airey, 2003; Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006; and Afferni, Ferrario & Mangano, in this issue). The reason seems to be two-fold: On the one hand, pilgrims often share many of the physical infrastructures and service providers as secular travelers. This is as much a historical manifestation as it is a practical, technological one, and several of the articles in this issue show how pilgrimage trails and destinations have been given new life through modern, secular tourism. Indeed, Bauman (1996) considers tourism the 'successor' *par excellence* of pilgrimage in this age of 'liquid modernity' (2000). On the other hand, many self-professed pilgrims that I have interviewed during my research on the Catholic shrine of St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina acknowledge secular, touristic inclinations (i.e., comfortable amenities, satisfying food, reliable information by guides and interpretive markers) (Di Giovine, 2010a), just as many secular tourists profess to attribute a kind of sacrality to non-religious sites that have deep meaning for them (Di Giovine, 2010c; cf. Sears, 1998). In short, these travelers are often able to shift their identities based on the level of importance they attribute to the peoples, places, or practices with which they interact at the moment. Thus, I find it helpful to define pilgrimage as a ritual journey from the quotidian realm of profane society to a sacred center, a passion-laden, hyper-meaningful voyage both outwardly and inwardly, which is often steeped in symbols and symbolic actions, and 'accrete[s] rich superstructures' of mythological representations (Turner & Turner, 1978, pp. 9, 23). Such a definition dissolves the rigid binaries between tourism and pilgrimage, and between religious and secular motivations, while not denying them altogether as post-structural theories tend to do; my research has revealed that many pilgrims (in the West, at least) seem to continue to inform their actions through recourse to these dualisms (see Di Giovine, 2010a). It also maintains an emphasis on the sacred — broadly conceived — since interaction with a hyper-meaningful site that is conceived of as set-apart from quotidian, 'profane' sites is a primary impetus for pilgrim movement. And at a broader level, this definition emphasizes the emotion and heightened significance that self-professed pilgrims attribute to their touristic experience (see Di Giovine, in press).

Just as it is in the ideological interest of religious authorities to embrace and promote normative communitas, it also seems to be in the interest of site managers to foster a sense of commonality when interacting at a destination. Understanding the emotional, social and cultural 'fault lines' of divisiveness and contestation between and among groups of stakeholders, as well as their common affinities towards a sense of union, can serve to minimize costly conflict at the site, systematize the site's meaning and enhance its promotion to a wider demographic, facilitate sustainable economic development, and even cultivate a broader appreciation for the site's conservation (see, in particular, UNESCO, 1972, 2008; Di Giovine, 2009a). At a deeper level, fostering communitas also meets the idealistic objectives of some touristic stakeholder groups, who — like Rana P.B. Singh in this volume — view tourism as an instrument for creating cross-cultural communication and education, mutual respect among peoples, and even

world peace (Kelly, 1999; Askjellerud, 2003; Poole, 2004; Salazar, 2006; Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010; Di Giovine, 2010, 2011). Singh's piece in particular shows how such idealism contrasts with broader national politics, yet how a deeply engrained structure of normative communitas can minimize even the most divisive of actions.

In honor of the 20th anniversary of the publication of Eade and Sallnow's *Contesting the Sacred*, the issue brings together an international and interdisciplinary body of scholars to extend the debate to a diversity of settings and for a diversity of religions, including Buddhism, Catholicism, Christian Orthodoxy, Hinduism, and Islam. Almost all, furthermore, deal squarely with the issue of secular tourists at these sites. We are also fortunate to include two exceptional commentaries by John Eade and Nelson Graburn, who provide us with important longitudinal perspectives on the developments within pilgrimage and tourism studies in the twenty years since *Contesting the Sacred* was first published. Taking opposing stances, they also productively debate the analytical efficacy of the conceptual binaries (communitas/contestation, host/guest, etc.) employed in this issue and by tourism researchers in general. Lastly, drawing on the contributions in this issue, as well as my own ethnographic fieldwork (2008-2010) at the mega-shrine of contemporary Catholic saint and stigmatic, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, this article will more deeply interrogate the dual concepts of communitas and contestation as they are employed in this issue, expand on their relevance for tourism research, and offer a possible model of tourism's social structure that may rectifying the divide between them, and help tourism planners better implement structures of normative communitas.

Victor Turner's theory of communitas

Communitas (in its purest, 'existential' form) is the 'direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities, which, when it happens, tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogeneous, unstructured, and free community' (Turner, 1973, p. 193), a strong and sudden feeling of being a unique yet equal part of the human race (Turner, 2004, p. 97; see Goodman, 1947). Although Turner adapted the term from a model of urban planning along community lines (E. Turner, 2004, p. 97; see Goodman, 1947), communitas should not be confused with 'community,' an idiom that implies an organized, socially structured group of people, often (but not always) living within a particular geographic region (cf. Tönnies, 2001). Rather, communitas is the inverse of this; it is the feeling that an individual and his fellow pilgrim companions temporarily transcend the hierarchical social roles that often serve to divide them in their everyday life — as well as the arrangements of these positions and statuses that we call 'social structure' (Deflem, 1991, p. 14) — and experience a oneness with each other.

Turner's idea of communitas, along with the broader field of symbolic anthropology in which he is often considered a leader (cf. Babcock & MacAloon, 1987, p. 1), was very much devised as an alternative to the two prevailing theoretical positions in British anthropology at the time: structural-functionalism as conceived by Émile Durkheim and elaborated by prominent French and British anthropologists since; and Marxism,

particularly as employed by his mentor, Max Gluckman, and the Manchester School of which he was originally a part (Eade, 2000, p. x). Considered one of the fathers of sociology (Giddens, 1976, p. 1), Durkheim viewed society as an organism composed of unequal, yet integral parts working together in a harmonious division of labor (1978). He argues that in periods of *anomie*, when these parts lose their sense of oneness with each other, society creates instances of 'collective effervescence,' a fleeting sensation of togetherness that serves to get all of its parts to function in union once again. Marxism, however, posits a grand narrative in which society passes from highly organized and stratified social structure (feudalism and capitalism) to a utopian, egalitarian society (communism) as individual members (later, whole classes) within the division of labor become alienated (Marx, 1978). Gluckman combined Marxism's philosophical emphases on power, ideology, and domination with in-depth case studi-es and legal argumentation to form the theoretical core of the anti-colonial (and post-colonial) Manchester School of anthropology (Werbner, 1984). Turner, whose doctoral work was with the Ndembu tribe of Zambia, was a student and friend of Gluckman, but was also drawn to performance theory (thanks to his mother, an actress (see Turner, 1982, p. 9) and Arnold van Gennep's work (1960) on rites of passage (see Turner, 1964). Turner's early book, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967), combined these interests; conflict was conceptualized as social drama, which takes form through initiation and passage rituals. It is precisely this drama that serves as a mechanism, or at least the necessary condition, for the creation of existential communitas.

Possibly the most significant aspect of this text was Turner's elaboration of van Gennep's ritual structure of rites of passage, which is composed of separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal) and re-aggregation (post-liminal) phases. In particular, Turner paid close attention to the liminal, or transitional phase — when an actor is 'betwixt and between' statuses, separated out from his or her social world and thus not quite the same as (s)he was before the ritual, but not yet transformed and reintroduced into society with a new social status. It is in this ambiguous phase — pregnant with possibilities (1967, p. 97) — when traditional social conventions are suspended (if not inverted), that the fleeting sensation of *communitas* emerges. It is a feeling of unity and comradeship that bonds the group of initiates, irrespective of their previous social status, political or economic power, or class affiliation; a recognition that despite social differences, all are the same. One may notice Turner's attempt to posit a 'third way' between Durkheim and the Marxist Manchester School. Though Turner argued, against Durkheim, that 'the physical rather than social body is the basal template of all semiotic systems' (Babock & MacAloon, 1987, p. 3; see Turner, 1967, pp. 90-91), communitas is described in much the same manner as Durkheimian collective effervescence: a fleeting, rejuvenating feeling that occurs outside of quotidian experience (cf. Engelke, 2000, p. 8; Mentore, 2009, pp. xiii-xiv); yet the sensation itself very much resembles that ideal communal one that Marx posits; it is 'a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes' (Turner, 1973, p. 216).

Later, having converted to Catholicism in 1953 and transferred from Manchester to the University of Chicago by way of Cornell (and, Graburn reminds us in this issue, a year-long fellowship at Stanford's Center for Advanced Study in the very "anti-structural" atmosphere of 1960s Palo Alto, California), Turner began applying this theory more directly to pilgrimage. Examining mainly Catholic pilgrimages in Latin America and Europe (but also referencing South Asian and others), he argued that pilgrimage itself is a movement from a secular center to a spiritual 'center out there' (see Turner, 1973; cf. Orsi, 1991), referencing Mircea Eliade's centre-periphery model of sacrality (1959). The act of peregrination itself resembles the liminal phase of a ritual; he considers it liminoid ('quasi-liminal') since, unlike most passage rituals, pilgrims may voluntarily move in and out of it (1974a; Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 35). It is during this liminoid movement, when actors are geographically and socially between the two poles that dominate their cosmological lives, that they tend to experience *communitas*. The notion was compelling, and backed by a fusion of multi-sited ethnographic data, personal experience, archival data, and theoretical grounding in his previous work on African ritual, it continues to influence pilgrimage research to this day.

One can sense the idealistic, almost romanticized, liberation theology at work in Turner's theory (cf. Babcock & MacAloon, 1987, p. 14): *communitas* is social 'anti-structure,' 'not a structural reversal ... but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses' (Turner, 1982, p. 44). Although the 'bonds of communitas are undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, extant, nonrational, existential, I-Thou (in Feuerbach's and Buber's sense)' and 'concrete, not abstract,' it 'does not merge identities' but liberates them from conformities to social norms (1974b, p. 274). Since it is anti-structural, Turner argues, it may be perceived by the 'guardians of structure' as dangerous or subversive, and associated with ideas of purity and pollution (202). One also senses the influence of both the Manchester School and Turner's Catholic identity among his largely atheistic academic colleagues (see Engelke, 2000, p. 847) in his emphasis on marginality. For Turner, pilgrimage was an exceptional, marginal phenomenon in broader modern, secular society; a grassroots, popular movement, which, if left uncontrolled, is looked upon as suspect. Particularly when Catholic pilgrimage is concerned, he is certainly correct (see Christian, 2009). One should understand that Turner developed this theory during the implementation of the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council reforms, which attempted to co-opt and integrate much of the charisma of popular religion into its liturgy (cf. Turner, 1976, p. 506). Indeed, Pope John XXIII, who convened the Council, was himself ambivalent to pilgrimage surrounding Padre Pio at the time (John XXIII, 1960) and actively suppressed his cult (Luzzatto, 2009, pp. 369-370).

It is imprecise to state that Turner did not recognize contestation in pilgrimage or other ritual practices, although he surely downplayed it. Rather, the three phases of communitas they outline seems to be an attempt to recognize the ways in which society reacts to, even contests, anti-structural tendencies. Normative communitas is

existential communitas organized and structured into a system of ethical precepts, legal rules, or fixed rites — as can be seen in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and its *doxa*. It is, in Weber's terms, an attempt to 'routinize' the exceptional and potentially subversive power of existential communitas into its structure (1946, p. 297). Normative communitas is likewise often informed by ideological communitas, the 'symbolic vehicles' that promote idealized, utopian models that are 'conceived to exemplify or supply the optimal conditions for existential communitas to occur' (1978, p. 135). Linked as they are, these are not permanent conditions but rather occur in cycles (Deflem, 1991, p. 15); as Edith Turner clarifies (with just a bit of Marxist utopianism), existential communitas 'becomes sect, then church, then a prop for a dominant political system, until communitas resurges once more, emerging from the spaces of freedom often found in betwixt-and-between situations. Revivals are of this nature' (2004, p. 98).

Indeed, Julia Klimova's contribution to this issue provides the best example I have come across concerning the cyclical nature of communitas that Edith Turner describes. Klimova traces the double movement of Russian Orthodox immigrants in California who leave their quotidian affairs to participate in the 'normative communitas' of their home parish, only to find its micropolitics and embeddedness in secular life divisive and disruptive to their spiritual lives. Their solution is to regularly undertake a taxing pilgrimage to a Greek Orthodox monastery deep in the Arizona desert, where they are made to toil in hard labor, wait idly for a chance to talk with a confessor, and participate in a Mass they linguistically do not comprehend. Yet they attest to the revitalizing effect of the pilgrimage, which spiritually re-centers them by inducing a feeling of existential communitas not only with their fellow pilgrims, but also as members of the universal Orthodox Church. We see, however, the limits of existential communitas, since non-Orthodox (those outside of the structure of normative communitas fostered by the Church) are, as a rule, excluded from participating.

It does not seem to be a chance occurrence that the Turners developed this theory after their conversion to Catholicism — Edith Turner reminisces that they were fully engaged in personal devotions during their ethnographic research on Catholic pilgrimages (Engelke, 2000, p. 848-849), and Willis points out that, for Turner, 'there was, most unusually, no apparent distinction between life and work' (1984, p. 75; see also Deflem, 1991, p. 1). Indeed, this notion seems to be rooted in the Catholic doctrine of *communio*, the communion of believers who make up the Church (George, 2009, p. 18-20), which is likewise conceived in an organic, corporate fashion as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 17-18; Ephesians 5, 29-30). Furthermore, St. Augustine of Hippo specifically employs the metaphor of pilgrimage to describe the unifying, yet individually-instantiated interior journey all Christians must undertake from the *civitas terrena*, or 'city of man,' to the heavenly city of God, *civitas Dei* (1958, pp. 205-206). These are not (necessarily) tangible cities (which would be written as *urbs* in Latin), but rather moral orders; the *civitas terrena* is that which is ordered by social structure. In the liminoid act of moving between orders — actively pursuing God through love

(p. 191) — pilgrims are universally bound together in a new, transitional order Augustine calls the *civitas terrena supra terram*, or the city of God on earth — the Church. 'The City of God invites all people from all nations and races together and unites them into a single pilgrim band,' Augustine writes; 'she takes no issue with customs, laws and traditions, which on earth were used to foster peace. Rather, she takes and appropriates whatever is best from these diversities of diverse races, to use for maintaining everlasting peace' (p. 458).

Contesting Turner's notion of communitas

A number of critiques emerged from anthropologists who found not unity at pilgrimage shrines, but rather an exacerbation of social stratification (see Werbner, 1977; Morinis, 1984; Sallnow, 1987). Some, such as Pfaffenberger, argued that even when ecumenicism seemed to prevail among two religious groups sharing the same site, true communitas was not likely to be experienced between the two 'in the absence of at least some consensus on the qualities of the pilgrimage deity and the manner in which he ought to be worshipped' (1979, p. 270). Others found that pilgrimage exacerbated personal animosities and reaffirmed divisive social structural attributes (including gender and caste) among even a seemingly homogenous group of pilgrims (Messerschmidt & Sharma, 1981, p. 572; Sallnow, 1981, p. 173; van der Veer, 1984; Sax, 1990; see also Geertz, 1980, p. 174). Viewing pilgrimage from a psychological perspective, Bilu (1988) concluded that if pilgrimage fosters a sensation of brotherhood among strangers, then such a relationship is akin to sibling rivalry. In *Contesting the Sacred*, both Dahlberg and Eade's chapters on Lourdes focused on aspects of personal suffering and the frequent competition between lay volunteers (*brancardiers* and handmaids) who assisted the masses of devotees — many of them sick or handicapped — at the healing baths of this important European Catholic pilgrimage center, while McKevitt — in one of the few anthropological papers on Padre Pio's shrine of San Giovanni Rotondo (see also Christian, 1973; Scarvaglieri, 1987; Margry, 2002; Mesaritou, *in press*) — focused on the competition and alienation between, on the one hand, the Capuchin monks who ran the shrine and the secular inhabitants of the town, and on the other, between the Sangiovannesi, who considered themselves 'real' locals, and immigrant devotees who permanently or quasi-permanently settled at the shrine to be closer to their spiritual center. Focusing on these quasi-permanent devotees, McKevitt's piece also complicates the fundamental assumption that pilgrimage is a liminoid occurrence; it begs the reader to question if it is possible to live in a permanent liminal state (as Turner suggested "marginal" peoples such as hippies do), and at what point, then, does liminality become quotidianeity.

Eade and Sallnow synthesize these critiques and outline a new analytical model of pilgrima-ge. They argue that Turner's paradigm — like Durkheimian and Marxian theories — is problematically a historical and universalistic; it fails to truly account for the historical and cultural idiosyncrasies that structure a particular pilgrimage experience. Pilgrimages are not monolithic, they point out; they are not all equal, they are not all structured the same way, and they do not all share the same goals. Rather than viewing pilgrimage, as Turner and his supporters do, as a place where social order is subverted

(existential communitas), or supported (normative communitas), pilgrimages should be seen as a realm of contestation and competing discourses (2000, p. 5). Bringing the historical uniqueness of each site into the mix, they further argue that the site's sacrality, or hyper-meaningfulness, is produced through the synergy of person-place-text (9). This highly resembles Dean MacCannell's earlier model of a tourist attraction, whose 'sacralization' is produced through tourist-site-*marker* (1976, p. 44); a marker is any signifier (textual, visual or otherwise) that creates the meaning of the destination (Coleman & Elsner, 1991, p. 72) come close to suggesting MacCannell's paradigm in their review of Eade and Sallnow). For MacCannell as well as for Eade and Sallnow, conflict naturally occurs as these variables change from person to person, and group to group, through time: while the physical place may stay the same, different actors, who consume and re-produce different markers of the site, will vary — often producing conflicting narratives of the significance of the hyper-meaningful place (see Coleman & Elsner, 2003).

Coleman and Eade (2004) revise this model to include movement, as well. Pilgrimage is an embodied experience, they argue; it is often predicated on the physical act of moving from one setting to another through time (cf. Frey, 1998). Even place, therefore, becomes a variable in this model. (We currently see complications of this notion in UNESCO's designation of 'cultural itineraries' such as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain and France as World Heritage *sites*). It is with this concept that our present volume begins. Writing on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, Kiyomi Doi engages with Coleman, Deleuze, and other post-structuralist theorists to implicitly complexify these rather rigid, categorically based models, arguing that a pilgrimage site should always be considered *emerging*; its meaning constantly changes, modifies, and transitions throughout the journey as the embodied individual herself changes throughout the journey. The encounter with other individuals and other social groups — so very important in the theory of communitas — is not significant simply because it challenges or solidifies a social order, but because it is a creative act that actu-ally shapes the total meaning of the site itself.

Reconciling communitas and contestation: The field of touristic production and the case of Catholic pilgrimage to St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

How can one reconcile the discrepancy between one analyst who sees communitas and another who sees contestation? I find Sallnow's suggestion that a serious researcher's embrace of Turner's theory can 'inhibit an appreciation of the contradictions and emergent processes' in pilgrimage (1981, p. 264) less compelling. Rather, it seems more likely that it is contingent upon one's view of the social structure of pilgrimage — and tourism. Elsewhere I have argued that it is rather imprecise to view tourism's structure through the traditional binaries of host/guest (cf. Smith, 1977), local/outsider (cf. Murphy, 1985; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Harrill, 2004), tourist/tourism industry (cf. MacCannell, 1976), or even pilgrim/tourist (cf. Cohen, 1979), which the Turners, despite their statements otherwise, do indeed seem to favor. Rather, I suggested that tourism should be perceived as existing in a field composed of multiple, interacting stakeholder groups, each with their own 'epistemic culture,' to borrow from Knorr-Cetina (1999, 2000). Such groups are organized by, and take their identity from, the

particular forms of knowledge (or 'episteme') they possess, produce, and re-produce; furthermore, they are often socially sanctioned to define, promulgate, and speak authoritatively on these forms of knowledge. Indeed, despite the goods and services that tourism professionals may vend, the tourism industry is primarily a knowledge-based industry: Its modern origins stem from Grand Tour explorations that had a decidedly epistemological, or educational, purpose; it is predicated on a gaze (Urry, 2002) or 'way of seeing' that comes only with a certain level of knowledge or expectation, and is often facilitated by guides, guidebooks, placards, and other instruments of knowledge dissemination; and the industry itself often embargoes such forms of knowledge from non-industry professionals, even employing a particular 'lingo' (or 'travelese') that serves, on the one hand, to standardize common terms across traditional linguistic and geographic barriers, and on the other hand, to separate out those professionals inside the group from the common traveler outside (Di Giovine, 2009a, pp. 42-48). Just as travelese unites tourism professionals across geographic and linguistic boundaries, so too are authorized religious groups present in pilgrimage united, in part, through the employment of theological languages (i.e., Latin or Latin-based terms for Catholic theologians, Sanskrit for Hindus, Pali for Buddhists, etc.) and idioms (i.e., in the Catholic church, utilization of particular terms such as 'justification,' 'grace,' or knowledge of Biblical passages, liturgical rites, or Canon law). In short, they are united through their knowledge and use of such cultural markers in addition to their position within purely bureaucratic structures.

At my own field site of San Giovanni Rotondo, the mega-shrine of contemporary Catholic stigmatic, St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina (1887-1968), a number of these groups interact at different levels and with varying intensities: the Vatican hierarchy, the Capuchin Order who runs the shrine and of which Padre Pio was a member; secular community leaders; vendors; locals; tour sponsors (such as parishes, international Padre Pio prayer groups, Padre Pio foundations, cultural organizations and commercial organizations); tour operators who run the pilgrimage for the sponsors; and the various visitors themselves. In many ways, the forms of knowledge differ tremendously from group to group. The Vatican, for example, employs a very broad theological knowledge that views Pio pilgrimage in relation to that of other saints' cults through time, while the Capuchin Order at the shrine considers it, on the one hand, theologically within the lens of Franciscan spirituality (Capuchins are a reform order of St. Francis' Friars Minor), yet on the other hand, in very locally oriented and practical terms. Tour sponsors such as parishes each have their own understandings of the shrine's importance, as well; for Padre Pio prayer groups and some priests who lead parish tours, the pilgrimage is a chance to engage more deeply with Franciscan spirituality and devotion to Padre Pio; they focus squarely on Pio's teachings concerning suffering, confession, and devotion to the Virgin Mary. Other parish priests co-opt devotion to Pio, viewing him as a means of creating greater social cohesion within their parish; while they do attempt to make their sermons relevant to the Padre Pio-associated experiences their pilgrims would have, they focus less on Pio and favor their own parochial religious practices. These religious sponsors both differ greatly from a Sicilian company specializing in plastic food storage items which sponsors several low-cost tours a year to Pio's

shrine; they view the pilgrimage as a means of creating positive public relations towards Sicilian housewives, and of creating a captive audience to whom they try to sell their wares during the trip itself. And 'locals' — devotees from San Giovanni Rotondo or, I could add, those from his hometown of Pietrelcina — espouse a much different understanding of Pio's significance to their civic and cultural identities than other pilgrims (see Di Giovine, 2009b, 2010b; *forthcoming*).

These various knowledge-based stakeholder groups do not operate independently of each other, but rather within a Bourdieuian 'field of touristic production,' as I have elsewhere called it (Di Giovine, 2009a, pp. 42-48). For Bourdieu, who used his theory to analyze the contemporary art world described by Becker (1982), a work of art is not created by simply one painter, but by the various groups who each have a stake in it. These groups struggle among themselves, both implicitly and explicitly, to define the object's meaning and to best utilize it; this act creates the total significance of the object, or, in our case, the pilgrimage site. Furthermore, their actions are relational; they engage in practices of positioning and position-taking with respect to the moral, epistemological, or commercial stances of other groups. In addition, these processes also occur *within* groups too, as individuals struggle with others to assert their moral, intellectual, or economic superiority over their fellow group members (for example, two tour operators struggling to position themselves as the best travel planner for a particular destination, or the managers of two nearby shrines competing to draw more tourists). Just as these groups often create competing discourses and practices, they may also align with one another when cohesiveness is in their best interest, becoming 'adversaries in collusion' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 79). Perceiving the touristic structure as a field of production, therefore, can highlight areas in which contestation structurally emerges, as well as present opportunities to foster normative communitas. And sometimes there may even occur those events in which groups are brought together in spontaneous, existential communitas.

This is what occurred in early 2010, towards the end of the extraordinary, two year period surrounding Padre Pio's exhumation, exhibition, and transfer to a new basilica nearby, designed in Pio's honor by the internationally renowned architect, Renzo Piano (see Cabodevilla Garde, 2005, Saldutto 2008). From the beginning, the Capuchins' decision to unearth Pio's body — which lay under a church built during his lifetime to accommodate the flood of pilgrims who came to participate in Mass with Padre Pio, to confess their sins to him (he was thought to know their transgressions before they uttered them), and to catch a glimpse of the stigmata (bleeding lesions on his hands, side and feet, which he suffered for fifty years) — was met by critiques and accolades by the different epistemic groups at the shrine. Devotees (particularly Italian) who remember meeting Pio when he was alive, or who made repeat trips to his tomb, were generally against the move. So, too, were many older Sangiovannesi and Pietrelcinesi, though the latter often leveled their critiques privately. A contingent of Pio's family members even attempted to sue the Capuchins for the 'desecration' of his tomb ('Padre Pio tomb "desecrated"' 2008). It is clear from interviews I have conducted that the old church serves as a *lieu de mémoire* (Nora, 1984, 1989) for these seasoned pilgrims, for

whom moving Pio's body to a new site seems to deny the significance of their memories, which play such an important part in defining their identities as pilgrim-devotees (Di Giovine, *forthcoming*). However, their direct criticisms were in line with traditional 'popular anti-clericalism,' of Mediterranean Catholic cultures (see Riegelhoupt, 1984; Badone, 1990, pp. 13-15): They argued that the Capuchins' motivations were to 'exploit religious sentiments' for economic benefit, in the words of one farmer outside of Pietrelcina. They also pointed to the fact that Pio, an ascetic Capuchin, used donations and *ex votos* given to him by devotees to construct a world-class hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo, the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (the Home to Relieve Suffering), while his Capuchin confreres now use them to build a self-congratulatory mega-church, wherein Pio's new crypt is adorned in floor-to-ceiling mosaics made from melting down literally tons of gold jewelry donated by devotees. Yet Irish pilgrims, whose devotion to Pio emerged comparatively more than that of Italians, and is less localized at Pio's original tomb, perceive the Renzo Piano basilica as a fitting resting place for such a charismatic saint, akin to the cathedrals and monasteries of Ireland that have weathered civil strife, famine, poverty and warfare.

The Capuchin site managers were generally reactive, staking out their position in relation to these critiques, and often specifically appropriating other epistemic groups' rhetorics to appear objectively universal. To those who argued that the Capuchins were simply erecting a 'pharaonic tomb' (see Colafemmina, 2010b), they drew on artistic and architectural terminology, as well as liturgical precedent, to craft statements concerning the aesthetic and theological appropriateness of the construction. In particular, creating such a monumental destination is not only fitting for Pio, they argued, but would solidify his presence in the cult of saints — much like the basilica in Assisi, with its fresco cycle by Giotto, had accomplished for St. Francis. Tour operators in particular picked up on this discourse and integrated the new, art-filled basilica in their promotional literature. To those arguing that the construction was commercially motivated, the Capuchins spoke of the tourism-centered management problems that the church would solve: it is more handicapped accessible, able to safely accommodate the tens of thousands of devotees who throng the shrine at one time, and is equipped with up-to-date technology. Such discourses were supported by many of the tour guides who, despite their ambivalent feelings towards the new basilica, agreed that the new construction would better accommodate their clienteles. While other religious groups, including the Vatican and national Padre Pio foundations and prayer groups, were publically supportive of these claims, one could nevertheless find dissension among individuals: priests and prayer group leaders privately voiced their sympathies with disgruntled devotees, and even some priests went as far as to publically accuse Capuchins of being a Masonic temple (Villa & Adessa, 2006; Colafemmina, 2010a).

These acts of positioning and position-taking by various epistemic stakeholder groups exacerbated tensions, public and private, during pilgrimages between 2008, when news broke that Pio would be exhumed, until April 2010, when the Capuchins, giving very little notice, moved Pio's body from his old crypt to the new basilica in a formal celebration of the liturgy of translation. Announcements, press releases, and homilies

by Capuchins in the days leading up to the translation were marked with ideological communitas, extolling the greatness of Padre Pio for all believers, irrespective of their stance on the new basilica. They also employed their own epistemic language; they cited Bible verses to support their claims for moving Pio, and they talked of liturgical *translatio* — the 'translation' of his body rather than its mere 'movement.' The liturgy they planned, like all Catholic Masses, was in part an exercise in normative communitas. Yet the tension was palpable that day: journalists from across Italy were present in search of disgruntled devotees, while a couple of the most radically outspoken critics handed out pamphlets requesting a last-minute boycott of the celebration. Pilgrims came from across Italy and Europe, and jockeyed for a prime position in front of the old church's bronze doors to see Pio's sarcophagus ceremoniously emerge. While standing amid the throng, I spoke to several self-proclaimed locals about their feelings on the translation: one, an elderly lady from San Giovanni Rotondo, recounted her memories of meeting Pio with her parents and said moving him was unthinkable ('*non si capisce più niente*'); another, a middle aged man from the nearby city of Foggia, also recounted his memories and stated that, while he stayed away during the 18-month exhibition of Pio's body, he and his wife felt it was fitting to be present for Pio's move. One prayer group recited the rosary in continuum while another sang contemporary religious songs. Another middle-aged woman, who came with a contingent of Pietrelcinesi, turned up her nose when she heard a description of the 'crypt of gold' in which Pio would be interred. Yet when the bronze doors opened, spilling incense out into the piazza, and Pio's body poked its way through, a roar of applause washed over the masses as if a tidal wave, amid shouts of 'viva Padre Pio!' The women surrounding me cried. È *troppo commovente* – it's too moving, one said, echoing the words of a well-dressed middle aged northern Italian recounting the event on his cell phone. The throng followed the sarcophagus into the new basilica, and took their place in the pews, watching the silver, jewel-encrusted casket being lowered into the golden crypt on immense television screens. They participated in the private *translatio* Mass going on below their feet thanks to those screens; they prayed together, sang along, and even took pictures of the televised images. When the Mass was through, no dissention could be heard; rather, pilgrims left the contested church uplifted, cheerfully talking and posing for pictures, and discussing the event with other pilgrims. All seemed, at the very least, united in their devotion to, and support of, Padre Pio.

The translation of Padre Pio's body illustrates not simply a spontaneous and effervescent experience of communitas, but, more importantly, it highlighted the boundaries of these diverse epistemic groups, the positions they staked out in relation to one another, and, finally, through what kinds of meaning-making mechanisms were these positions able to be leveled, or even transcended (cf. Weber, 1947). Despite being engaged in prolonged, emotional struggles, these groups were able to harmoniously come together around a common celebration, and mutual understanding, of the hyper-meaningfulness of Padre Pio. Indeed, the presence of mechanisms that attempt to explicitly and implicitly 'totalize difference' (Wallace, 1970, p. 10; 2009; cf. Sahlins, 2002, p. 488) seems to be an equally important structural facet of pilgrimage. That is, while the field of touristic production is certainly a realm of competing discourses,

it seems that there also must also occur these moments of mutual recognition among actors that other groups also attribute great meaning to, and have a stake in, the same pilgrimage system. Such bonds of communication, which are experienced as communitas among some — if not all — of these groups at various times over the life history of the shrine, will prevent inevitable schism should such division be excessively prolonged.

Conclusion: The relevance of this debate for tourism studies

This paper attempted to provide an introductory overview to the debate surrounding communitas and contestation — which I hope is both accessible and useful to an interdisciplinary audience — and to rectify the two sides of this debate by positing an alternative model of tourism (of which pilgrimage is a part, I argue) as a 'field of touristic production.' In this model, adapted from Bourdieu, epistemic groups struggle and compete amongst themselves to best define and utilize the destination, but they also necessarily cultivate communicative bonds at varying times and intensities, in which they explicitly and implicitly experience mutual appreciation of the hyper-meaningfulness of the site (i.e., normative and existential communitas). It is precisely the social drama created by these different and oft-conflicting epistemic groups, brought together around a shared, hyper-meaningful destination, that creates both the basis for existential communitas to emerge, as well as the necessity by site managers and other mediators to foster normative or ideological communitas.

The model of a 'field of touristic production' has both practical and analytical applications. On the one hand, it underscores the relationships between individuals and groups, taking into account that not all groups interact at the same time and in the same geographic place. Furthermore, the 'markers' or re-presentations they produce about the site do not reach each group equally, are not consumed in the same way, and may not even be comprehensible to some; this is a point that Eade develops in his critique of the rationalist, ontological approach to pilgrimage featured in this issue's commentary. In addition, as the evocative autoethnographic account of the Manimahesh pilgrimage (in this issue) by Jonathan and Sukanya Miles-Watson vividly reminds us, with different knowledges or understandings of the same site comes different expectations of the pilgrimage experience, which, in turn, translate into different practices on the pilgrim trail itself. Conflict — both inter- and intra-personal — often occurs precisely when the 'expectations gap' grows too large (Di Giovine, 2009a, pp. 176-180). On the other hand, however, as many of the papers show, there are site-specific mechanisms in place to create some sort of corporate unity out of diversity, whether through norms or ideological discourses, or more spontaneously through the desire to resolve actual conflicts.

This understanding may help researchers of pilgrimage to better focus on the interactions between specific epistemic groups. It can also assist practitioners concerned with fostering so-called normative communitas to better pinpoint those groups who may frequently clash, or whose actions may have a detrimental effect on the experience of

others. This is the crux of Rana Singh's argument concerning the Buddhist pilgrimage site of Sarnath, on the outskirts of Varanasi: when presumably Hindu and/or secular site managers in the governmental organization, the Archaeological Survey of India, which oversees these sites, required the purchase of tickets to enter the site, local Buddhists not only felt marginalized, but were also impeded in their desire to worship. Singh argues that not only did this unintended consequence even occur to the site managers, but other groups — cultural tourists, local Hindus, and others — are also ignorant to how such policies affect their fellow visitors for whom the site has a very different significance.

This model also emphasizes that epistemic groups' interactions require not only acts of communication, but also of translation. Often specific epistemic groups emerge to fill this particular necessity at a site. Tour guides are an excellent example, for they are first and foremost knowledge mediators; their knowledge is formally tested and authorized by governments or site managers, and, as Katriel (1997) demonstrates in her ethnography of Israeli tour guides on kibbutzim, the most successful ones can translate their particular set of knowledge to different groups of visitors whose understanding of the site and its significance varies widely. That guides are nearly ubiquitous at tourist destinations may mask their uniqueness and site-specificity, however (cf. Salazar, 2010). Indeed, as Kiran Shinde shows in his contribution to this issue, such acts of translation between epistemic groups at the Hindu shrine of Tuljapur often occurs through ritual specialists called *pujari*, who act as quasi-guides or middlemen that put devotees in contact with religious and touristic service providers. On the one hand, they possess almost 'secret' knowledge of the best rest houses and other services, as well as cultivate personal relationships with priests and other service providers that allow the pilgrim to maximize his or her time before the image of the saint. On the other hand, they also possess specific knowledge about the clients, whose families have for generations called upon their particular family's services — thereby creating social bonds throughout time and space that are re-affirmed and re-solidified at these sites. Being a liminal 'contact zone' (Pratt, 1992; Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004) is therefore not enough (Tomljenović, 2010); there must be mediators present to harmoniously interpret and translate groups' oft-conflicting forms of knowledge.

While tied to anthropological and philosophical theories, the debate over communitas and contestation also has particular relevance and strong implications for both the academic study of (secular) tourism, as well as the general management of tourist sites, as the majority of the papers in this special issue directly reveal. Not only can pilgrims not be easily separated out from secular tourists in this (post-)modern and 'post-traditional' age wherein sacrality is often divorced from pure religion (D'Agostino & Vespasiano, 2000, p. 5), but pilgrimage sites have often themselves become 'secularized' for mass touristic consumption — or 'hybridized' for and by 'new spiritualities,' as Eade, citing Chris Philo *et al.*'s ongoing project (2011), points out in his commentary here (cf. Brown, 1998). Francois Cazaux's contribution to this issue talks of how a new generation of 'pilgrims' have given new life to the Camino de Santiago de Compostela,

yet these self-identified pilgrims are anything but religious, while the implications of Kiyomi Doi's article is that the significance of the site itself for a pilgrim is determined by what meanings, spirituality (or lack thereof), and past experiences (s)he brings to it. This is precisely what Raffaella Afferni, Carla Ferrario, and Stefania Mangano (in this issue) wished to ascertain in their quantitative visitor study of the Sacred Mount of Varallo, an important mechanism during the 16th century Counter-Reformation to co-opt and redirect popular religiosity that the Protestant Reformation sought to negate, but now predominately a destination for non-religiously motivated leisure travelers. Comparing their study's results with one taken nearly two decades earlier, they sought to ascertain how visitor demographics, as well as the meanings they attribute to the site, have changed over time.

More importantly, fostering a sense of unity, of mutual respect and appreciation between these diverse groups is of primary import in the management of tourist sites, particularly after the sustainability turn of the late 1990s, which favored more engagement with local stakeholders, a better understanding of the multiplicity of meanings and uses of a tourist destination, and more equitable distribution of economic and social profits from tourism development initiatives (Smith & Eadington, 1994; Stronza, 2001; Telfer, 2002; Mbaiwa & Stronza, 2009). In other words, contemporary tourism planning requires an understanding of the broader structure of epistemic groups that converge at a site, as well as a sensitivity towards them that often must transcend the 'normal' social divisions that may exist in non-tourist contexts. It is precisely when tourism becomes perceived (and enacted) as a 'form of imperialism' (Nash, 1977), when the balance between epistemic groups is thrown wildly astray, that potentially damaging schism may occur (Brown, 1998). This is the crux of Rana Singh's message to readers in his contribution to this issue. He points of the ways in which pilgrimage has historically been utilized by Indian politicians, from pre-Mughal times to today, to assert political and ideological power — often leading to the destruction of religious sites that are not only of spiritual value for some, but also historical and artistic value, and which factor into people's very identities. But what is so powerful is his example of terrorist attacks on certain structures in Varanasi, which the fringe groups thought would create divisions between Hindus and Muslims, but which served — thanks in part to a deeply engrained structure of normative and ideological communitas — to unite them.

While these papers contribute to theorizing those instances in which class, status, and other elements of social structure complicate or impede participants' sensations of communitas, there is also a hopeful tone to the vast majority of them, and, I think, to the issue in general. This was not planned, but it emerged as an element of commonality between them. All viewed the persistence of socio-cultural divisions, at least at a foundational level, in these modern pilgrimages; yet at the same time, they recognized that in spite of contestation — or precisely because of it — there often emerges communitas; despite diversity, there can be unity. While this conclusion is a bit idealistic, I think that none of these authors suggest that such unification is the product of some

universal process — of a Durkheimian need to create solidarity, of a grand historical narrative *a la* Marxism, or of a purely existential, ahistorical and utopian process of Turnerian communitas (or, conversely, of an equally universal process of contestation that Eade and Sallnow originally posited). Rather, despite historical contingencies and the socio-cultural, economic, geographic particularities of each site, there seems to exist a necessity for communication and translation, for recognizing the hyper-meaningfulness of a destination for others who share in the pilgrim experience, for maintaining and preserving the place for future travelers. I therefore have argued here that it is incumbent upon tourism managers to identify the diverse groups at play, their primary motivations, and the ways in which they re-present themselves and their understandings of the place, so as to implement effective mechanisms of normative communitas at the destination that can bridge these differences without attempting to dissolve them. For without drama, there cannot exist communitas (cf. Huizinga, 1971). Indeed, this issue of *Tourism* teaches us that communitas and contestation are not simply predicated on one or the other, but rather that both dialectically inform each other, keep each in check, and complexify the already complex set of discourses and practices that surround, and create the significance of, pilgrimage sites.

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