Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Introduction

Mobility and Centring in Pilgrimage

VIDA BAJC, SIMON COLEMAN & JOHN EADE

Pilgrimage has become a major cross-disciplinary area of research in recent years. In an era of global mobility and imposition of novel forms of 'flow' and 'closure' (Meyer & Geschier, 1999; cf. Bauman, 1996), during which we are witnessing religious resurgence quite as much as secular apathy, pilgrimage continues to inspire scholars to think about the complex interplay of forces involved in its emplacement within, and flow through, numerous social and cultural contexts. But perhaps more than any other type of mobility, pilgrimage makes sense in relation to a destination. It is this purposeful movement in relation to an end goal that forces us to think about what is involved in its momentary stasis.

In pilgrimage, as in tourism and migration, destination as a place is often captured through the notion of a 'centre' – that goal towards which movement gravitates and where pathways converge, a kind of 'attractor' in the nodal network of mobilities around which objects, emotions, cultures and people circulate (Turner, 1974; Urry, 2003). The centre is conceptualised as a point at which these flows and relationships between them become temporarily grounded, a site of brief ordering, a location which situates so that movement can become imbued with meaning. Much analysis of pilgrimage and related tourism has been concerned precisely with processes of movement of people to and from centres, with forces that stimulate or hinder these journeys, and with the transformative dynamics that surround their interstices (e.g. Cohen, 1992).

The notion of place as centre has therefore been implicitly or sometimes explicitly 'central' to scholarly depictions of pilgrimage, not least in Victor Turner's (1973) famous article 'The Center out There' (a piece that straddled anthropology and religious studies in its theoretical orientation). In the context of recent theoretical shifts within a number of disciplines from static descriptions of social behaviour towards more dynamic models of social life as process, subsequent work in tourism and pilgrimage (e.g. Coleman & Eade, 2004; Rojek & Urry, 1997; Timothy & Olsen, 2006) has given primacy to the notion of movement at the expense of 'centre'. Yet, as Soja (1989) reminds us, in the postmodern world of mobility and decentring, centres nevertheless hold. As some dissipate, fall apart, dissolve or fade away in oblivion, others are formed, reinforced and reinvented. The nodality of the centre defines and

gives substance to the specificity of mobility. Centring holds because its ordering contextualises and situates mobility (Soja, 2000).

The centre thus remains key to our understanding of mobility, even though it has not yet received the analytical scrutiny that it requires. This collection seeks to fill this lacuna. We take the insights from current scholarship and its focus on the movement *towards* or *away from* the centre to be able to grasp and theorise the movements *of* the centre itself. How is the centre as place constituted, *dis*placed, moved and shifted (indeed, decentred) as people, objects and cultures that define it, converge around it or are otherwise associated with it, travel? We think about how the idea of pilgrimage as involving 'the centre out there' is transformed as social processes themselves question the distinctions between dwelling and movement. Taken together, contributions to this volume provide perspectives on the historical, cultural and social factors behind the growth and, in some cases, the relative decline of 'centres', as well as examining the varied ways in which such places have been conceptualised in different religious and cultural contexts. We use pilgrimage to answer a much broader, cross-disciplinary theoretical problem, relating to how 'places' come to be through gathering together some surprising cultural materials, including forms of movement and the construction of itineraries, as well as ideologically charged notions of localisation and translation. We also point to the fragile nature of place, both as a metaphor and as a material basis for (religious) culture.

In reflecting on these issues in this introduction, we present the contents of the volume by taking some insights from the adaptations and interpretations of recent advancements in complexity theory in physics, as they have been brought to sociology (Eve, Horsfall & Lee, 1997; Urry, 2003), anthropology (Mosko & Damon, 2005) and the humanities (Hayles, 1990). In her Prologue to *On the Order of Chaos*, Marilyn Strathern (2005) suggests that theories that travel from natural sciences to humanities and social sciences have a long trajectory, with many rebirths on the way. They begin life as ideas, are articulated as mathematical formulae, become shaped as computer calculations, are reinvented in the form of computer graphs, and finally turned into a text. In these verbal forms they become inspirations for social sciences and humanities, metaphors that enlighten our observations of social life and stimulate our intuitions about the social world we observe.

Here, we use some of these insights to help us think about pilgrimage as involving different styles of mobility in space. We are interested in seeing how this mobility makes sense in relation to the interplay of contingencies involved in its emplacement. Two concepts from complexity theory are particularly stimulating in this regard.

First, we suggest that the notion of 'attractors', which refers to patterns emerging out of random mobility, can help us to think beyond pilgrimage destinations as static containers within which things happen and rather to see them as products of interactions between pilgrimage activities through time and the particular physicalities of a place.

Second, we see 'bifurcation' as a term that expresses the capacity for such patterns to diverge, displace and disperse along a trajectory and reappear through time in similar form in some other places. The notion of bifurcation can help us envision how specific localisations of pilgrimage activities, wherever they happen to appear,

may relate to other pilgrimage destinations, from which they draw inspiration and impetus.

Destination as Place-in-Time

That famous observer of pilgrimage, Mircea Eliade (1954), was concerned with what he considered 'archetypal' destinations, whose centring patterns appeared relatively durable, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem or Mecca's Kaaba in Saudi Arabia. However, rather than simply thinking of such destinations in Eliadian terms as 'zones of the sacred', we can see them as attractors (Urry, 2003) whose temporal dimension reflects the believers' imaginary of some moment of creation and whose aesthetics reflect the pilgrims' centring through ongoing ritual practice. Ritual practice in such places has often produced ordering that is familiar to the pilgrims who are attracted within. As we learn in this volume through Erin Kenny's discussion of the *hajj*, pilgrims in Mecca join millions of others in their patterned flows of prayers and movements. Similarly, in her study of a pilgrimage group that walks in the footsteps of Jesus on his last hours from the Mount of Olives to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Bajc (2006) also draws attention to how, as the group enters within, the pattern of its flow conforms to the patterns inside the Church. Casey (1987, p. 190) helps us understand the phenomenology of experience at such a destination. Places that have the capacity to set transformations in motion, he writes, cannot be locales 'that seem to want to keep us out'. They must be social spaces that allow us to 'project a state of already having inhabited it', that is, 'the dwelling we plan to build on'.

But while for some, such places are inviting, for others, of course, they can be deeply alienating. In this issue, the importance of this latter point is demonstrated in Agata Szczeszak-Brewer's reading of *Ulysses* as well as Simon Coleman's reflections on Victorian representations of the Holy Land. Leopold Bloom sets out on a pilgrimage through his home city to find a centre that would allow him to place himself, to ground himself, to emplace himself in the world from which he is estranged. Bloom enters different kinds of (not necessarily sacred) places: a bar full of drinking men, a church where people are engaged in the ritual of the holy Mass, a cemetery, a bordello, a local newspaper office and many others. Each of these locales already has established aesthetics and practice which order and centre the life of the individuals within. Yet, for Bloom, none of these places make him feel that he can build on what has been there before. For him, the sense of already having inhabited these places is not created and therefore, for him, transformations do not occur.

Similarly, Simon Coleman traces how various Protestant Anglican pilgrims from Victorian England entered locations in the Holy Land that were already half-known. Yet, Coleman's shows how nineteenth-century British painter William Holman Hunt's depiction of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre during the Orthodox Easter ritual of the Miracle of the Holy Fire illustrates the very representation of alienation. As Hecht (1994) suggests, of the whole variety of rituals practised in Jerusalem, the ritual of the Miracle of the Holy Fire, whose origins have been traced to the fourth century, is perhaps most known to be uninviting to non-believers. To the Orthodox pilgrims, including Greeks, Armenians, Copts, Syrians, Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Ethiopians and many others, this is the most significant

event, a ritual of cosmic renewal, practised every Easter Saturday morning following the Orthodox calendar. This is the time when thousands of people gather inside the church, body-to-body, in anticipation of the Holy Fire descending from heaven into the tomb of Jesus located inside the Church. When that moment occurs, a priest brings the fire from the tomb and distributes the flame to all the pilgrims so that within a few minutes the whole Church is transformed as it is lit with candlelight. However, as Coleman shows, to the British artist, influenced by the Protestant evangelicalism he brought with him from home, this patterning was not only uninviting but also threatening.

Like the pilgrims described by Szczeszak-Brewer and Coleman, the Evangelical Protestant Christians from Michigan discussed by Vida Bajc also reject the established ways of Christian Orthodoxy. In the case she presents, their centring takes a very different form. This is a pilgrimage group, organised through a travel agency, and accompanied by a spiritual leader from home as well as an Israeli Jewish tour guide. The group is attracted to a landscape that, in Eliade's terms, is familiar to the group through its reading of the Bible. For this reason, the landscape itself has a potentiality to 'centre' these pilgrims but such a process is only possible when the landscape becomes more than just a physical space resembling biblical aesthetics drawn from a reading of the Bible. It must become a 'place-in-time' – defined precisely in relation to the event the pilgrims are about to experience. In Bajc's case that means that the tour guide must first emplot the landscape as the Valley of Ellah where, as narrated in *17 Samuel*, the biblical battles between the Israelites and the Philistines took place in the early years of the life of King David, so that the group can then set in motion their *own* patterning by enacting the biblical text. We see how the specificity of centring through pilgrimage is in the meaning its movement generates through some kind of transformative experience. Such experiences can be very different for different individuals as well as groups of pilgrims, partly because, as Coleman's and Szczeszak-Brewer's examples emphasise, they stand in the same physical space but they may not be 'emplaced' in similar ways.

How different groups of people with very different expectations seek to set in motion their own centring in the same physical space at a very different scale is discussed by Lawrence Taylor in his analysis of how the American frontier finds itself in the midst of a conflict over border migration. Taylor argues that the process of the establishment of the United States of America was based, first, on the Puritans' pilgrimage to the New World, and then on their continuous push into the western frontier. Taylor sees this process of building a new nation through continuous territorial expansion and colonisation by the Puritans as morally regenerative of each citizen and of the nation as a whole. This relationship between the settlers and the acquired wilderness continues to be experienced and reconstituted through walking through this landscape. Today, this process is centred on the US-Mexican border, a stretch of almost 2,000 miles where a variety of different groups with very different expectations seek to be emplaced. Latino migrants feel that their journey is 'in the hands of God' as they seek to permeate the state boundary and settle in the frontier in the hopes to better their lives. Volunteer American citizens who call themselves 'Minutemen', a symbolic reference to the volunteer fighters for US independence from the British on the East Coast, walk along the border, often armed, seeking to intercept the Latino migration. A Native

American group from the bordering state of Arizona seeks to assert its sense of being American by displaying the American flag and portraits of their members serving in the US military as they walk on their regular pilgrimage to the border. Groups of volunteers from different churches walk through this land to help the needy migrants and provide them with food and water. Associations dedicated to the preservation of the wilderness send their members through the land with the mission to preserve and protect the landscape so crucial to the individual and national re-generation. Here, too, we see how the specificity of centring through pilgrimage is in the meaning that this movement is able to generate for the people involved. The meaning is different for different groups.

At such a scale, centring and emplacement take on other dimensions. John Eade and David Garbin present a comparative case of centring of two groups of migrants in Britain in relation to their place-in-time, namely, different generations of Polish Catholics and members of the Congolese Protestant messianic cult of the Kimbanguist church. The latter is one of the largest African-initiated Protestant movements. In the case of these two groups of immigrants, centring becomes an issue of religious and political negotiations between the place-in-time in the country of origin and the diasporic communities located in other parts of the world. For the Kimbanguists, the place-in-time is in Nkamba, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nkamba is the birthplace of its founder Simon Kimbangu, a sacred prophetic space, the main site of pilgrimage for the Kimbanguists, as well as their political centre. In the case of the Polish Catholics, the place-in-time is the Marian shrine of Częstochowa in Poland, in many ways a national symbol which centred many Poles throughout their recent history of rapid internal political changes. Eade and Garbin show how the centring processes at Nkamba and Częstochowa are shaped differently as their respective believers migrate to other countries. In the case of Nkamba, centring is hindered through major internal divisions and conflicts played out internationally over what constitutes charismatic power of this centre and its spiritual leaders. In the case of Częstochowa, we see the opposite. Here, the religious leaders are looking for ways to attract the Polish Catholic migrants back to the centre in their country of origin by appealing to common sentiments of what has otherwise become a spiritually very diverse group.

Displacing the Destination

Places such as Mecca and Jerusalem, and in some ways also Nkamba and Częstochowa, draw together pilgrims from all over the world, aim to centre them through their own patterns, create potentiality for transformative experiences of whatever kind, and then disperse the pilgrims in all directions. There is in this process the potential to generate new attractors wherever the dispersed pilgrims or the narratives about their experiences happen to be 'emplaced'. In the language of complexity, these are points of 'bifurcation' that enable the coming to existence of so-called 'fractals', attractors whose patterns of centring in some ways resemble the place-in-time from which they bifurcated. Historically, pilgrimage has often involved mobility of destinations across space in the form of shrines that echo the architecture of the destination, portable souvenirs that pilgrims bring with them as they return, and examples of forms of liturgical and clerical entrepreneurship in the suppression

as well as the encouragement of shrine construction (e.g. Christian, 1989). Such fractals exist on different scales of complexity, as they both mirror the centring at archetypal destinations and express a potential for transformation. They may also begin to form their own patterns of centring.

Thus, in this volume, Erin Kenny presents the bifurcation of pilgrimage to Mecca. As a devotional practice, *hajj* is expected to generate spiritual growth and enrichment. Upon return to the home environment, this experience is turned into social capital, through which pilgrims to Mecca are able to establish their social position at home. While in Mecca, Muslim believers undergo transformative experiences of *umma*. In Kenny's case of the Mande of Upper Guinea, this experience has multiple dimensions. The particularity of *umma* endows the pilgrims with spiritual capital. The opportunity to be able to undertake this journey creates social capital by contributing to local understanding of what it means to be successful and considered a part of the cosmopolitan Muslim community. The gifts they bring from the centre allow them to establish social relations through strategic gift-giving. Together, they enable these pilgrims to create 'fractals' of their centring in Mecca in the home environments to which they return. Kenny presents how two *hajjis* with very different social backgrounds, each in his own way put their spiritual and social capital into practice by establishing a new social status and social relations of reciprocity in different ways through the capital their pilgrimage has afforded them. Each is able to establish himself as a centre around which complex sets of local hierarchies of prestige, authority and personal networks converge.

For the artists and writers of the nineteenth century who visited Jerusalem, as discussed by Coleman, such 'fractals' manifest themselves in different ways and different kinds of social expectations. These literati produced books and art exhibitions through which they sought to engage the Protestant Victorian public upon their return back home. Their being in Jerusalem and their experiencing its ways provided them with the potential to set in motion another kind of attractor, one that centred believers back home who potentially saw themselves as undergoing religious as well as social change. For these representations to be able to attract the Victorian public in England, however, these artists and writers had to be able to negotiate different kinds of demands. The public expected that narratives and images would represent naturalistic descriptions of the Holy Land. But such representations were often meant to proselytise. For this reason, they needed sacramental qualities that would convey the intensity of religious experiences at the destination. At the same time, however, they had to be clearly distinguishable from what was seen as Catholic and Orthodox idolatry. A successful displacing of the centre in Jerusalem and establishing of fractals of these centres back home, Coleman shows, depended on how successfully these multiple demands were able to be negotiated and their goals accomplished.

Migrants who leave their place-in-time behind to establish a new life in another country often carry with them the desire to create fractal versions of that centre in the state in which they settle. Eade and Garbin describe how the Polish Catholics in Britain took part in the effort to revive a Marian shrine near the village of Aylesford some 40 miles south of London. This pilgrimage site, which was obliterated following the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, came back to life in the twentieth century, particularly following the Second World War, as Catholic

migrants settled in the country. For the Polish diaspora of the post-Second World War era which did not maintain close ties to Poland, the shrine helped sustain community life and the long pilgrimage traditions associated with the centre of Częstochowa. The Congolese diaspora started what Eade and Garbin call 'prayer cells', fractals of the homeland church that aimed to centre the diasporic Congolese in people's homes and community halls, strengthening kinship ties and other ethnic loyalties. The socially better positioned among them were able to establish mega-churches with a wider theological appeal not only to African migrants but to other charismatics.

Many of these fractals become networked and interrelated in interesting ways. Kenny's study of centring and bifurcation through *hajj* suggests an interesting dynamic between Saudi Arabia, the state which has jurisdiction over Mecca, and the spread of Wahhabiyya Islam. Saudi Arabia has in recent years invested heavily in infrastructure and technology in order to be able to accommodate the rising numbers of Muslim pilgrims. This state also promotes this particular kind of Islam. In the case of the Mande in Upper Guinea, conversion to the Wahabi version of Islam that often follows the pilgrimage to Mecca becomes a ticket into a relatively closed and tightly knit regional merchant community with global ties. Similarly, many Congolese churches built in Britain established ties with other churches in the Congo's Kinshasa, other European urban nodes such as Brussels, Paris or London, and even with churches in North America. So, too, the Kimbanguist religious leaders seek to preserve a strong link between the diaspora and Nkamba, a site of emplacement that is also a 'heterotopian' territory endowed with multiple Biblical meanings and strong references to a pan-African identity and a post-colonial collective memory. So, too, the different groups that seek to emplace themselves in the area along the US-Mexican border depend on the presence of one another in that their centring patterns become meaningful in relation to the centring of other groups in that place. How these ties are established and maintained and what kinds of mobilities they enable to flow between them depends on social and cultural differences between settlers and sojourners, between permanent and circular migrants and between countries of origin and countries of settlement.

Final Remarks

If pilgrimage, then, is a profoundly relational social practice, how centring emerges cannot be contingent upon individual pilgrims or sites, but on the interactions that emerge between people, places, times and imaginaries. As Turner (1974) maintained, whether or not one sets out on a pilgrimage is ultimately an individual decision. In Islam, every believer is expected to make the journey to Mecca, providing that appropriate financial status is reached, but whether or not one possesses sufficient funds to undertake the journey is decided at an individual level. In Christianity, as is often emphasised, each individual makes a decision to go on a pilgrimage in a way that is usually not determined by religious dogma. Turner, however, also understood that once the pilgrim is on the way, his or her transformative potential is very much contingent on the sociality of which the pilgrim becomes a part. How pilgrims establish relations with each other in addition to how they relate to the setting shapes the ways they are able to emplace themselves and the kinds of transformations they

may be able to experience. Transformative experiences emerge simultaneously within each individual pilgrim, within the group of pilgrims present at that time, within the larger social setting, as well as within the global relations encompassing all of the former.

The papers in this volume demonstrate that one significant challenge for pilgrimage studies is working out, first, how to conceptualise transformative potentials in sacred travel at different scales of complexity, from the individual to the global, and, second, how such relational dynamics emerge in space and through time not only within each scale but also across multiple scales. What are these points of intersections at which the level of the personal transformative experience can be said to intersect and connect with the global? Under what conditions does such a circuit emerge so that the flow can be made possible between the individual pilgrimage experience and the transformations at a larger social setting? From this perspective, insights from complexity theory offer one way forward towards our understanding of the relationship between movement and 'centring' – perceived as a verb rather than a noun. In these terms, the 'centre out there' cannot be taken for granted, as tends to be the case with early studies on pilgrimage. Rather, the 'centre' must be seen as constantly translated to new places, at different scales, and with often unanticipated social consequences. Nor can pilgrimage be seen as a social phenomenon that is either geographically or analytically isolated from other cultural practices. As a cultural practice which both 'circulates' and 'centres', pilgrimage deserves to have a significant place in the 'centre' of contemporary social theory.

Acknowledgements

References

Bajc, V. (2006) Christian pilgrimage groups in Jerusalem: Framing the experience through linear meta-narrative, in: Special Issue Collective Memory and Tourism: V. Bajc (Ed.), *Journeys: the International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing*, 7(2), pp. 101–128.

Bauman, Z. (1996) From pilgrim to tourist – or a short history of identity, in: M. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage).

Casey, E. (1987) *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).

Christian, W. (1989) *Person and God in a Spanish Valley* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

Cohen, E. (1992) Pilgrimage centers: Concentric and excentric, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19, pp. 33–50.

Coleman, S. & Eade, J. (Eds) (2004) *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London: Routledge).

Eliade, M. (1991[1954]) *The Myth of Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

Eve, R., Horsfall, S. & Lee, M. (Eds) (1997) *Chaos, Complexity, and Sociology. Myths, Models, and Theories* (London: Sage).

Hayles, K. (1990) *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

Hecht, R. (1994) The construction and management of sacred time and space: *Sabta Nur* in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in: R. Friedland & D. Boden (Eds), *NowHere: Space, Time and Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), pp. 181–235.

Meyer, B. & Geshiere, P. (1999) *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Closure and Flow* (Oxford: Blackwell).

Mosko, M. & Damon, F. (2005) *On the Order of Chaos. Social Anthropology and the Science of Chaos* (New York: Berghhan Books).

Rojek, C. & Urry, J. (Eds) (1997) *Touring Cultures. Transformations of Travel and Theory* (London: Routledge).

Soja, E. (1989) *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso).

Soja, E. (2000) *Postmetropolis* (Oxford: Blackwell).

Strathern, M. (2005) Prologue, in: M. Mosko & F. Damon (Eds), *On the Order of Chaos. Social Anthropology and the Science of Chaos* (New York: Berghahn Books), pp. xii–xv.

Timothy, D. & Olsen, D. (Eds) (2006) *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys* (London and New York: Routledge).

Turner, V. (1973) The center out there: pilgrim's goal, *History of Religions*, 12(3), pp. 191–230.

Turner, V. (1974) Pilgrimages as social processes, in, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 166–230.

Urry, J. (2003) *Global Complexity* (Cambridge: Polity Press).