Chapter 1
Introducing Sacred Mobilities: Journeys of Belief and Belonging
Tim Gale, Avril Maddrell and Alan Terry

Introduction

This opening chapter addresses conceptual and theoretical issues of relevance to the types of journeys that feature in Sacred Mobilities, and provides an overview of subsequent chapters in which the relevant narratives, concepts, theories and debates are explored in more detail. It discusses competing notions of the ‘sacred’, critical readings of the key concepts of liminality and co-presence, and the turn to mobility in the social sciences and what this, in turn, can tell us about these movements and their meanings.

The volume introduced here is concerned with ‘sacred mobilities’ in their broadest sense, with ‘journeys of belief and belonging’ – incorporating a spectrum of those movements and travels prompted by religious, more broadly ‘spiritual’ and secular-sacred practices and priorities. Drawing on the ‘New Mobilities Paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006), it offers useful insight to notions of sacred journeys (Coleman and Eade, 2004), where they intersect with people, objects and other things on the move. In turn, it considers how spiritual meanings and practices, however broadly defined, can shed light on the motivations and experiences ascribed to mobilities (Maddrell, 2011, 2013; Maddrell and della Dora, 2013a, 2013b).

The original call for contributions to Sacred Mobilities was constructed with a view to capturing a variety of perspectives on, and examples of, journeying to and with the ‘sacred’, as understood by participants in those journeys regardless of religion or their beliefs. Most of the responses we received focussed on spiritual and secular, not institutionalised religious, journeys, and ‘belonging’ rather than ‘belief’, tendencies that are reflected in/across the chapters selected for publication. This shows how notions of the sacred have become stretched in recent years – well beyond institutionalised religion and the study thereof.

Defining the Sacred and the ‘Blurring’ of Boundaries

In his mid-twentieth century treatise The Sacred and the Profane, Mircea Eliade (1957) presented a dichotomisation of the sacred and non-sacred. While the sacred
related to those spaces and practices associated with the manifestation of the divine or spiritual world, anything outside of this arena was profane and mundane. Eliade argued that these views were broadly held by adherents of most belief systems, but were not necessarily shared by non-believers. This clear distinction between the sacred and the profane both reflected and reinforced those who believed that theophany (the manifestation of a god or the divine) or hierophany (the manifestation of the sacred) was spatially located in fixed points, such as places of revelation, apparition, healing qualities or miraculous powers. This in turn gave rise to particular geographies of the sacred, as individual bounded spaces and as spatial patterns produced by networks of these spaces. Hence, it is possible to map Aztec temples, Hindu sacred river crossings or tirtha, and sites reputed for Marian apparitions. Whilst these sites were often attributed with degrees of permeability between the visible material world and invisible, more-than-representational and other-worldly phenomena (see Maddrell and della Dora, 2013a), they were also attributed with impermeable external boundaries (here is holy, there is not); by extension, in this world view, (full) access to the sacred is typically limited to the initiated believer.

However, this model is challenged by theologies which assert the immanence of the divine (for example the animist belief that spirits are present in all creatures, plants, rocks and so on, or the Protestant Christian belief that God can be accessed at any time and in any place). It is also challenged by theologies and spiritualities, and their related epistemologies and ontologies, which recognise the dynamic and relational qualities of beliefs, practices, experiences, identities and ways of being in the world. Thus, in Western thought and practice in the twenty-first century, the sacred not only includes spaces and practices of formal religion, but also those of alternative and self-spirituality (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) and everything attributed with the highest value and respect (Milton, 2002). Within studies of pilgrimage, itself an iconic sacred journey, these perspectives are exemplified in two key ways. Firstly, in collections such as Reader and Walter’s (1993) Pilgrimage in Popular Culture, which includes studies of secular journeys to war graves (Walter, 1993) and football stadia (Davie, 1993). Secondly, in the conceptual shift within pilgrimage studies from a primary focus on particular geographical locations such as shrines (for example Turner and Turner, 1978), to analysis of wider embodied-emotional-spiritual-social-spatial relations. This can be seen in Eade and Sallnow’s (1991) Contesting the Sacred, with its focus on the interrelation of people-place-texts, Dubisch’s (1995) practice-centred study of pilgrimage on Tinos, In a Different Place, Frey’s (1998) phenomenological account of Pilgrim Stories. On and Off the Road to Santiago, and Coleman and Eade’s (2004) Reframing Pilgrimage, with its particular focus on the agential qualities of movement within pilgrim experience and the processes of sacralisation.

Within the social sciences, pilgrimage is sometimes assumed to be associated only with traditional, god-fearing societies, an ‘ancestral behaviour’ under threat of redundancy from secularisation in Europe, North America and elsewhere (Knox and Hannam, 2014). However, this overlooks a significant body of evidence to
the contrary; for example, an estimated 16.6 million people travel for religious purposes in the United States alone (Saltzman, 2010; cited in Olsen, 2014), and 300 million worldwide (National Geographic, 2011; cited in Notermans, 2012). Looking at pilgrimage specifically, 2.3 million pilgrims attended papal events in 2012 (Catholic News Service, 2013; cited in Olsen, 2014), over one million pilgrims undertake the Hajj to Mecca each year, and cyclical pilgrimages such as the Hindu Kumbh Mela attract 10 million pilgrims, representing ‘the largest regular assemblages on earth’ (Morinis, 1992: 1).

What then do the pilgrimage practices of these varied faith communities have in common? The potentially multi-stranded or competing characteristics of ‘pilgrimage’ have been variously identified as: (i) a journey to a sacred place; (ii) life as a pilgrimage towards the afterlife; and (iii) an inner journey of contemplation and reflection; (iv) a religious requirement; (v) an act of penance; (vi) a form of petition, notably for healing; (vii) a means of individual or faith community renewal; (viii) a re-inscription of, or search for, meaning (see Digance, 2006; Dyas, 2004; Eade and Sallnow, 1991; Maddrell and della Dora, 2013b; Winkelman and Dubisch, 2005). For anthropologists Turner and Turner (1978), pilgrimage is essentially the practice of journeying to sacred places. A place is deemed to be sacred by being associated with relics, revelations or miracles, and pilgrims to such places experience aspects of ‘liminality’ – a familiar trope to which we shall return later. The idea of ‘life as pilgrimage’ features in several contributions to this volume. Here, the notion of pilgrimage as a lifelong project culminating in one’s passing into a realm beyond the phenomenal world transcends individual religions and religion per se. Pilgrimage as an ‘inner journey’ may be facilitated by but does not require physical movement as such, but rather moments of stillness and imaginative travel (see the later discussion of mobility/ies and Maddrell (2011, 2013)). Thus it is important to note that the iconic Western image of a long-distance pilgrim is far from representative of all pilgrimage practices, let alone broader sacred mobilities.

The breadth of practices encompassed by the term ‘pilgrimage’ can, however, present conceptual challenges. In a response to Knox and Hannam’s (2014) ‘word games’, in which they deliberately conflate the concepts of pilgrim and hedonist, Margry argues for the retention of basic distinctions, and pointedly defines contemporary pilgrimage as:

… a journey out of religious or spiritual inspiration, consciously undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place or along a track that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with the sacred for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit. (Margry, 2014)

However, as illustrated by this collection and others, any definition of the sacred and its related spaces and practices, needs to be sufficiently inclusive to accommodate the idea that ‘what becomes labelled and adopted as sacred by society does not
Sacred Mobilities

have to pertain to religion [or spirituality]' (Tresidder, 1999: 141). Hence Morinis' broad definition of pilgrimage as 'a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal' (Morinis, 1992: 4) is adopted here as a framework for exploring a wide range of sacred mobilities, regardless of whether they are grounded in religion, self-spirituality or secular passions. Digance (2006) has argued that a definition of pilgrimage appropriate to the twenty-first century is needed, and we suggest the notion of 'sacred mobilities' as an umbrella concept which accommodates the wide variety of practices discussed here.

The pilgrim-tourist debate has featured prominently in studies of tourism, religion and spirituality. These issues have been rehearsed at length elsewhere (for example, MacCannell, 1976; Graburn, 1983; Stausberg, 2011) and do not need reproducing in full here, yet merit some brief consideration. There is a noticeable tendency in the literature to emphasise what religious pilgrimage and tourism have in common, and to metaphorically compare the latter to the former. Both require leisure time and financial resources; and are condoned – and in some cases valorised – by the society in which they are practiced (Smith, 1989; cited in Holden, 2005). Also, there are many circumstances in which the interests and practices of ‘pilgrim’ and ‘tourist’ overlap; for example, pilgrims acting as tourists en route to a shrine – sightseeing, souvenir-hunting and socialising – and heritage/cultural tourists, hikers and those in search of the spiritual, rediscovering and appropriating traditional routes such as the Camino to Santiago, or investing a sense of the sacred in more modern and seemingly secular sites like Elvis Presley’s home and place of burial at Graceland. This echoes Turner and Turner’s (1978: 20) phrase that ‘a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist’. Extending the comparison further, tourism is oft-described as a ‘sacred journey’ (Graburn, 1989; Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005), characterised by ritualised practices (such as sightseeing) and sacralised places (such as tourist attractions) (see MacCannell, 1976). Graburn (1983; cited in Sharpley, 2008) goes one step further to argue that they are one and the same: ‘if tourism has the quality of a leisure ritual that takes place outside of everyday life and involves travel, is it not identical to pilgrimage?’ Indeed, if we accept that the function of holidays (or holy days) in modern society is akin to that of religious festivals in traditional societies, then it is possible to argue that tourism is the modern metamorphosis of pilgrimage, robbed of its symbolic and mystical power by secularisation (Cohen, 1992). Furthermore, it can be argued that pilgrims clearly satisfy the definition of tourists as those who travel from home on a temporary basis for non-work-related purposes. Regardless of whether one subscribes to these views, tourism and pilgrimage share common attributes such as (some) geographical distance from home and freedom, for a time at least, from some everyday responsibilities. Ultimately pilgrims and tourists may have much in common, but their specific motivations and experiences need to be interrogated in order to understand any sacred attributes of that experience.

Subsequent references in this chapter to pilgrims and tourists as categories of/labels attached to people on the move are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but
serve to advance or frame a particular point or argument that we are making, rather than to assert that they are somehow different and should always be described thus.

Key Concepts: Liminality and Co-presence

Turner and Turner (1978) represented pilgrimage as a rite of passage, involving the spatial (actual) and psychological (perceived) separation from everyday life and the rules and requirements that govern our behaviour, and the crossing of a threshold into ‘liminal’ time-space (a period of ‘neither here nor there’, an ‘in-between’ place). Here, they argued, normal social structures are broken down, and one can encounter the true self in moments of ‘flow’ and experience a sense of communitas (a shared understanding, or communion) with fellow participants in a heightened state of consciousness, before returning to society transformed by the experience (and often to a higher status). While this idealised model of pilgrimage, and especially the notion of communitas, has been critiqued (for example see Eade, 2000), this process of transformation has been effectively applied to a variety of touristic spaces and settings, notably beaches, hotels, planned events and festivals, even virtual worlds (see Gale, 2009; Getz, 2010; Preston-Whyte, 2004; Pritchard and Morgan, 2006). These may more accurately be described as having ‘liminoid’ characteristics (after Turner and Turner, 1978) – a self-imposed rite of passage that is not quite liminal or life-changing, but still offers a means of escape from daily norms and routines and the possibility of fulfilment/self-actualisation (if not transcendence). Frequently implicit in liminal (or liminoid) phenomena and processes is a sense of co-presence, of a shared experience that generates a range of emotions, feelings and affects. Hence Urry (2002: 256) argues that ‘one should investigate not only physical and immediate presence, but also the socialities involved in occasional co-presence, imagined co-presence and virtual co-presence’. Clearly, religious pilgrimages and other forms of sacred mobilities, including secular-sacred journey-assemblages, represent such time-spaces of co-presence (real, imagined or virtual).

Co-presence also explains another aspect of why people undertake sacred journeys. One of the key distinguishing factors between pilgrimage and tourism is the motivation for travel (Vukonic, 1996) although, as noted above, it has to be recognised that pilgrims can ‘take time out’ to be tourists and that tourists may find themselves unexpectedly experiencing the spiritual (Stausberg, 2011). It may be an obvious point to make, but religious pilgrims travel for reasons of their religion: for spiritual renewal or healing; to seek enlightenment; to enact penance for their sins; or to fulfil a promise they made to themselves or others. This has prompted some commentators to argue that tourists travel because ‘tourism is their religion’ (Runcie, 1988; cited in Urry, 1990), whereby tourists go in search of novelty and stimulation, or to escape to an environment that permits rest and relaxation (Iso-Ahola, 1982). Regardless of why people embark on sacred journeys (or journeys that for them are ‘sacred’), they are in most cases willing participants who commit
resources to making this happen (free time, discretionary income). However, there are certain ‘obligations’ of co-presence which suggest that journeying per se is not necessarily an entirely voluntary activity:

- To work, to attend family events, to visit public institutions
- To meet face to face, to develop trust, to note body language
- To spend quality time with family, partners or friends
- To sense a place directly, through embodied experiences
- To experience a particular live sporting, political or cultural event
- To work on objects that have a particular physical location.

(Adapted from Urry, 2002.)

Some of these obligations relate to (paid) employment, and may be dispensed with here. Others, however, are salient to this discussion. For instance, whatever potential we might ascribe to virtual forms of pilgrimage and tourism as replacements or substitutes for the real thing (see below), most feel sacred journeys require physical proximity to and sensory engagement with sites, routes and objects (to sense and interpret anything that might give meaning to the journey), and also bodily presence(s) (to be seen by others and make a symbolic expression of belief or commitment, and for intense moments of communitas). In this book, we see the compulsion to bathe in a holy river (Chapter 2), to tie ribbons to the branches of an ancient yew tree (Chapter 4), to get as close as possible to the action in a motorcycle road race (Chapter 5), to gaze upon and wonder at crop circles (Chapter 6), to enter a cathedral and celebrate mass at the end of a long journey (Chapter 8), and to visit an erstwhile family home (Chapter 11). These journeys are mostly undertaken in the company of or culminate in meetings with friends and family, colleagues or strangers (fellow worshippers, riders and spectators, artists and performers, tourists, workers, and so on), and generate a range of emotional responses and felt effects such as renewal or loss (sometimes serving to unite people and other times to reflect and reinforce divisions).

The discussion above exemplifies the complexities and apparent contradictions inherent in defining what is sacred and more particularly sacred places and sacred journeys, including those subsumed under the heading of ‘pilgrimage’. These include the potential dialectic tensions between outer and inner ‘journeys’; collective and individual agendas and experience; a sense of sacred (hierophanic) qualities being found in particular locations and wider beliefs and theologies; and the roles of motion, travel and the extraordinary versus everyday lived beliefs and practices. Thus any individual or collective sacred mobility needs to be seen as an experiential assemblage. Deploying the concept of ‘sacred mobilities’ in this volume is grounded in recognition of those assemblage qualities and requires an understanding not only of the sacred, but also of mobilities, to which we now turn.
Mobilities and the Mobility ‘Turn’

Movement, however we choose to describe it, is full of meaning (Cresswell, 2006), from a walk in the park to a round-the-world trip. Any journey, sacred or otherwise, means something to the participant and will also have significance beyond the level of the individual (even if it may seem trivial). Journeys can be seen to encompass multiple and intersecting mobilities of various individuals (for example couriers, commuters and tourists), and other non-human sentient life forms and non-sentient buildings, objects and machines. Accordingly, and despite appearances, (sacred) sites and routes are not fixed and given but arise from contingent conjunctions of these agents and practices at particular points in space and time; these conjunctions afford the realisation of certain performances that are recognisable as ‘commuting’, ‘pilgrimage’, ‘tourism’ and so on. To use the nomenclature of the social sciences, ‘scapes’ (complex, but predictable networks) enable ‘flows’ (unpredictable movements), albeit in a circumstantial rather than deterministic fashion. Crucial to this is how mobility systems distribute people, activities and objects in/through time and space (Mavrič and Urry, 2009). In the Western world, many of these systems originated in the Industrial Age (for example inland waterways, the national postal service, guidebooks, timetables, organised excursions and department stores), whereas others have emerged more recently (motorways and high speed rail networks, jet aircraft, the Internet and so on). However, a mobilities approach goes beyond these systems to consider the experiential and performative dimensions of these movements, their meanings and significance. For example, movement, travel and related practices reflect wider social relations and produce particular rhythms (Edensor, 2010) that shape the place-temporality of landscapes and urban spaces (Wunderlich, 2010), including those shaped by sacred mobilities (Maddrell, 2011, 2013).

Mobility/ies is more than a concept; it is a post-disciplinary paradigm that integrates leisure and tourism, transport and migration, embodied practice and performance, with the potential for new ways of seeing and thinking about these things and the links between them. It is broadly concerned with mobile practices (for example walking, running, driving, cycling), spaces (roads, railways, airports, cities, the internet), and subject positions (tourist, commuter, migrant worker, refugee), and mobility at a variety of scales – from the global to the local (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011; Hannam et al., 2006). Introduced in Sheller and Urry’s (2006) ground-breaking paper as the ‘New Mobilities Paradigm’ (NMP), it can be traced back to earlier work in sociology and geography that problematised societies and regions as the best contexts for research in these disciplines (see Urry, 2000, 2002; Hall, 2005). The NMP calls into question the use of ‘sedentarist’ theories of people and place to understand a world where everyone and everything is seemingly on the move, travelling further, faster and more frequently than ever before. Not without its discontents (for example, McAllister, 2011), it nevertheless has the potential to transform conventional, discipline-based understandings of sacred journeys in six key ways.
Firstly, there is a move towards ‘de-exoticising’ travel, so that we are no longer preoccupied primarily with journeys to distant lands. Instead, attention is redirected from reductive descriptions of static places (for example, towns, shrines, places of worship) and predictable people (devout pilgrims, hedonistic tourists, hospitable locals and so on), to representations, practices and performances. Outcomes from this include a recognition of the complex and dynamic positionalities of individuals (for example, tour guide-cum-pilgrim, spiritual sports fan), and an interest in less obvious sacred sites and journeys. By ‘obvious’, we are not just thinking of, say, Lourdes or the Hajj, but also sites/sights of formal, religious pilgrimage that are not so widely known or celebrated; ‘less obvious’, therefore, includes spaces of secular pilgrimage and experiences such as dance clubs and raves, which correspond to earlier descriptions of ritualised behaviour and liminal spaces and bodies, with DJs (disc jockeys) taking on the role of ‘high priests’ on this occasion (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010). In this book, David Crouch comes closest to what has been described here with his account of sacred journeys in/of the mind, rather than through space (Chapter 3).

Secondly, processes that have enhanced the personal mobility of some people(s) are understood to heighten, and serve to highlight, the immobility of others (that is, marginalised or subjugated populations or groups within a given population). Opportunities to travel are frequently constrained by inequalities such as poverty, but can also be linked to injustices and broader conflicts in the past and present. This is particularly evident in Suha Shakkour’s poignant account of journeys undertaken by exiled Palestinians to (the sites of) former homes now under occupation following the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967 (Chapter 11), and also in Katy Beinart’s reflections on, and playful re-enactment of, the forced migration of her Jewish great-grandparents in the early 1900s to escape the pogroms of Eastern Europe (Chapter 10).

Thirdly, the NMP accommodates virtual and communicative travel, thanks to various digital, networked devices that can allow virtual participation in real time and negate the need for physical presence. This is demonstrated in studies of virtual pilgrimage (Rosander, 2004) or ‘cyberpilgrimage’ (Williams, 2013), virtual presence at funeral rites via webcam links (Maddrell, 2012) and virtual worlds as tourist destinations (Gale, 2009). Virtual mobilities are not discussed in detail in this collection, but the role of websites in the rhetorical shaping of sporting events as ‘sacred’ is discussed by Maddrell et al. (Chapter 5). Furthermore, non-corporeal mobility extends to imaginative travel as well; for example, the anticipation and recollection of sacred journeys (to be) undertaken by oneself and others including, in the latter category, people who are no longer alive but whose memory lives on in written records and artefacts. A case in point is Nina Vollenbröker’s use of manuscript diaries and patchwork quilts left behind by nineteenth-century settlers in the American West to retrace the journeys they undertook from their original homes in the eastern states (Chapter 9).

Fourthly, there is more (explicit) consideration of the outcomes of being on the move and those impacted by them, and of the undesirable and unintended
consequences of living mobile lives that are outside our control and threaten that very mobility (for example, dangerous climate change, dwindling oil supplies and terrorist atrocities). The latter represents an important agenda for mobilities studies, but is beyond the scope of this book; however, consideration of outcomes and impacts threads through a number of chapters. For example, many sacred journeys involve an element of risk; these risks can be managed or avoided, but they may also be embraced because they enable participants to apprehend their own mortality and to think about what lies beyond. Our study of the Tourist Trophy (TT) races on the Isle of Man serves to demonstrate this, with respect to those visitors to the Island who attempt to emulate their TT heroes and the speed at which they travel by riding the course on their motorcycles when not in use for races or practice sessions (Chapter 5). In addition to risks associated with mobility, there are mobile risks; these include the risk of death from crushing in mass gatherings and the spread of communicable diseases, as outlined by Nick Hopkins and colleagues in relation to the Kumbh Mela (Chapter 2).

A fifth characteristic, which has emerged more recently in the mobilities literature, is that of ‘moorings’ (Hannam et al., 2006). This idea recognises that mobilities are not only about movement and the experiences and meanings associated with that movement, but that these in turn relate to, and are dependent upon, particular fixed points, whether transport nodes, destinations, home or ‘family’. We can identify traditional notions of sacred places as nodes in pilgrimage and other sacred networks, but as this collection shows (notably in the chapters by Shakkour, Beinart and Vollenbröker) ideas of family, home, community, dwelling, individual and national identity all act as important ‘moorings’ within sacred mobilities. An individual or community’s relation to a particular ‘mooring’ may be fixed or dynamic and shifting, but understanding moorings is crucial to understanding mobilities, not least sacred mobilities e.g. the importance of shrines or sacred routes.

Finally, the NMP has foregrounded the use of interdisciplinary ‘mobile’ methodologies and methods in social science research, in order to capture life on the move. These include participant observation, time-space diaries, cartography and geographical information systems (GIS), cyber-research, visual and literary sources, oral histories and so on (a number of which are deployed in this collection). In the context of interdisciplinary pilgrimage studies, this rich methodological toolkit has facilitated nuanced accounts of pilgrim experience. For example, recent detailed studies on working class (Harris, 2013) and migrant women’s pilgrimage (Jansen, 2012; Notermans, 2012) supports Clifford’s (1997) assertion that pilgrimage is less gender and class-bound, and less Eurocentric, than other forms of travel.

Broadly conceived, this innovative collection of theoretical reviews and empirical case studies goes beyond simplistic analyses of and arguments about pilgrimage and tourism (often represented as the two ‘ideal’ types of sacred journey), to creatively explore the intersections of travel and both seeking and practising the ‘sacred’ through sacred mobilities.
Organisation of the Book

*Sacred Mobilities* is divided into three sections or themes: the Sacred-secular and the Secular-sacred (Section One); Tracing Historical Footprints (Section Two); and Sacred Journey: Home, Family and Nation (Section Three). The narratives, case studies and analyses presented by these individual chapters are subsequently drawn together and discussed in Tim Edensor’s Afterword.

The Sacred-secular and the Secular-sacred

Our exploration of the parallels between (and blurring of) the sacred and the secular begins with Chapter 2, by Nick Hopkins, Clifford Stevenson, Shail Shankar, Kavita Pandey, Sammyh Khan and Shruti Tewari. Their study of Hindu pilgrimage draws on social psychological research on crowds and crowd behaviour at more ‘mundane’ mass events (football matches, national festivals, protest marches and so on), with a view to understanding pilgrims’ experience of the Magh Mela at Prayag (Allahabad, India). There are several aspects to this that correspond with the earlier description of the mobilities perspective and what this brings to studies of sacred journeys: it rejects the idea that pilgrimage and tourism are marginal to everyday life and cannot be understood using theories thereof; it draws attention to the many different types of people that come together to perform the Mela and the roles they play (for example, pilgrim, beggar, vendor); it emphasises the acts of movement and bodily performances they engage in (walking, singing and so on); and it highlights the tensions and negative aspects of co-presence, as well as the benefits and transformative properties thereof. It also uses mobile methods (multi-sited ethnography, interviewing on the move).

In contrast, David Crouch invites us to look beyond the spaces and rituals of formal religion for the ‘sacred’ in Chapter 3, arguing that this resides within ‘us’ regardless of what we believe in (or not). He explores moments and feelings of immanence, of encountering the divine in everyday life and not as a transcendental ‘Other’ that we feel closer to by undertaking a physical journey to a faraway place or along a route that is deemed worthy of pilgrimage by a powerful religious group. Accordingly, and in keeping with his Quaker beliefs, our lives are to be lived as a personal act of ‘pilgrimage’ in which we need to be aware of and responsive to the spirituality and wonder that can reside in the most mundane of things, and in day-to-day practices and movements (for example, gardening, walking the dog).

Alternative spiritualities (‘alternative’ to the world’s major religions, that is) also feature in Chapter 4, in which James Thurgill provides an auto-ethnographic account of a neo-Pagan ritual that took place at the Ankerwycke Yew in the Middlesex village of Wraysbury, UK, on the occasion of Halloween 2011. He offers an insight into ‘magick’ (not to be confused with magic, as a form of entertainment), which has largely escaped scholarly attention to date. The idea that magick is innate in (certain) objects and realised through ritual performance resonates with particular forms of realism (see Gale and Botterill, 2005); indeed,
the chapter draws attention to the role of people as active agents in creating and performing ritual (liminal) space, together with the enduring structures and properties of objects that enable and constrain human agency.

Returning to the idea of ‘pilgrimage as metaphor’, this features in the accounts given by spectators at the annual TT (Tourist Trophy) motorcycle races in the Isle of Man, reported in Chapter 5. Here, we (with our colleague Simon Arlidge) consider how the TT is represented and experienced as a sports pilgrimage, as something that every motorcycle and road racing enthusiast should do ‘at least once in a lifetime’ (invoking comparisons with Muslim pilgrims journeying to Mecca for the Hajj). This is achieved through a combination of a survey of visitors and local residents, interviews with state and church representatives, and participant observation, further adding to the list of methods used in this volume.

Tracing Historical Footprints

History is foregrounded in the chapters that comprise the second or middle section of the book; for example, in discussing the antecedents to contemporary, post-/secular sacred journeys (for example, legend trips), or the origins and historical development of particular routes or traditions of pilgrimage. In Chapter 6, Rob Irving considers how places are shaped by myths and legends to become ‘legend landscapes’, a fusion of the psychic and the physical, a place where something extraordinary is said to have occurred. He proposes a typology of visitors to such places of enchantment: religious devotees; New Age mystical tourists; and legend trippers. Marian phenomena or apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary are discussed in some detail, and deconstructed, as examples of the melding of religious pilgrimage and legend tripping. However, the emphasis in this chapter is very much on the second of these visitor types, so-called ‘New Agers’, and their performative activity in and around Avebury, Wiltshire (UK). Designated a World Heritage Site (along with nearby Stonehenge), on the basis of the prehistoric monuments from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages that are to be found there, it is the association of the area with the more recent phenomenon of crop circles that is of interest here. Created by people, or ‘croppies’, yet deliberately construed as otherworldly events and the impressions they leave behind, crop circles are a demonstration of the multiple mobilities of ideas, behaviours, feelings and experiences that inhabit and give meaning to a legend landscape, according to Irving.

The other two chapters that make up this section of the book focus on the paths along which pilgrims travel or have travelled in the past (in a literal, rather than metaphorical, sense). Pamela Richardson’s biography of George Fox and his travels in North West England (Chapter 7) contains some evocative descriptions of the landscapes and people of the region, and brings to life the peripatetic existence of the preacher with its attendant hardships. The chapter moves through a number of different spaces which were central to the development of early Quakerism (the name given to the movement he founded) as a radical alternative religion, from the wild and lonely places through which Fox walked and in which he
preached, to the dank dungeons in which many early Quakers were imprisoned, and finally to the meeting houses which have become themselves the objects of modern-day Quaker pilgrimage. The chapter also considers Fox’s legacy and the development of Quakerism after Fox, including a number of early Quaker women whose mobility was closely connected to the practice of their faith. The simplicity of Quaker pilgrimage stands in contrast to other, more orthodox sacred journeys (echoing some of the ideas and arguments presented in Chapter 3).

Another such journey is The Way of St James, the restoration of which is described by Belén Castro Fernández in Chapter 8. Drawing on a wealth of Spanish-language literature, the chapter discusses the beginnings of the Way and its rise to medieval glory, and steady decline thereafter until the modern period. It then examines the appropriation of the Way for political purposes, initially under the Franco dictatorship, and how this gradually evolved into heritage/cultural tourism, transcending and perhaps forgetting its religious origins. In its discussion of the contestation of this transition, the chapter provides an opportunity to revisit the pilgrim-tourist debate discussed above, and presents arguments for not conflating these two subject positions, but rather continuing to observe the subtle nuances and distinctions between them.

Sacred Journey to Home, Family and Nation

The sacred journeys reported in the third and final section of the book are inspired by a search for ‘home’ or some other marker of identity (family, nationality). Whether searching for a new home (Chapter 9) or an old one (Chapter 11), many of the properties of pilgrimage described earlier can be discerned in the physical movements of people and other forms of mobility re-/interpreted in these chapters. These discussions of sacred journeys also share an emphasis on the tangible, material objects associated with home.

In Chapter 9, Nina Vollenbröker advances the idea of ‘dwelling’ in motion through a study of the Overland Trails of nineteenth-century America. Vollenbröker, as noted above, draws on a wealth of surviving traces of these migrations, including manuscript diaries kept by migrants en route, poetry composed in response to the landscapes they traversed, and diverse personal artefacts, including the quilts made by migrant women in spare moments on the road. She purposively counters and critiques established conceptions of rootedness – a desired state in Western cultures – as being contingent upon inhabiting a given location, and argues for the possibility of growing sacred roots in a mobile location. The approach adopted in this chapter could be described as innovative (at least in the context of the prior discussion of mobile methods), by using the creative output of (deceased) others as an expression of life on the move, including not only their written echoes but also, in examining the quilts, their more material traces.

Creativity is also a feature of Chapter 10, in which Katy Beinart narrates a 26 day journey from Antwerp to Cape Town by container ship in 2009. Accompanied by her sister Rebecca, an artist, Beinart was seeking to retrace a journey first
undertaken by her Jewish great-grandfather and great-grandmother many years previously, in order to escape persecution back home. Throughout the journey, the sisters sought to create and enact their own rituals of remembrance, baking bread with a grape must culture brought from home, and reconstructing family photographs using the original clothes of their relatives. Beinart draws upon discussions of heritage tourism, pilgrimage, mobilities and performative art practice to develop an account of such embodied play as a space of potential transformation, in which attempts at reconnection with and re-enactment of the past are framed in terms of complexity, (deliberate) confusion, and liminality, rather than being intended as a straightforward and sentimentalised direct recreation. The reader is invited to participate in the ongoing narrative, which may lead to many other interpretations of this particular sacred journey that cannot reasonably be anticipated here.

Chapter 11 also draws on themes of materiality, memory, and self-identity. Suha Shakkour deploys the process of site sacralisation described by MacCannell (1976 [1989]), to discuss how the sites of former homes of Palestinians (and extant buildings) in territory now occupied by Jewish-Israelis are endowed by their former inhabitants with a level of significance similar to that ascribed to sacred places. This process operates on both an individual level – focus on the lost home, its spaces and memories, and on the passed-down relics of now-useless keys and deeds – and also as a broader collective experience and narrative of the Nakba. Shakkour draws on a series of interviews conducted with Palestinians living in London. These provide vivid and moving accounts of respondents’ experiences of visiting these sites, and of the imaginative travel of those who cannot or will not visit them, which Shakkour places in the wider context of ‘diaspora tourism’. This makes for a fitting conclusion to the substantive part of the book, the ‘loose ends’ from which are dealt with in Tim Edensor’s afterword (Chapter 12).

References


Harris, A., 2013. Lourdes and holistic spirituality: contemporary Catholicism, the therapeutic and religious thermalism. *Culture and Religion*, 14(1), 23–43.


