

## To Be or Not to Be a Tourist: The Role of Concept-Metaphors in Tourism Studies

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### A Conceptual Introductory Note

Tourists have been labelled, metaphorically, in multiple ways (Dann 2002). This includes descriptions of tourists *as* (secular) pilgrims in a quest of authenticity (MacCannell 1976) but also *as* travellers on a sacred journey (Graburn 1978, 1983, 2001). In contrast, the stereotypical image that tourists are hedonists is related particularly (but not exclusively) with sun, sand and sex, and is associated with, sometimes unbridled, consumerism (cf. Salazar 2010a). This research probe deals with the question whether a tourist is a 'secular pilgrim' or a 'hedonist in search of pleasure'. Both descriptors refer to a debate among tourism scholars that started back in the 1970s. It is important to put the question and possible answers to it within the historical context of this discussion.

First, I would like to state that, in my humble opinion, this probe is not about tourist typologies. Knox and Hannam suggest otherwise: 'any time we set out to explore a dualism we go through a predictable process of arriving at a conclusion whereby we might reject the notion of the categories as mutually exclusive or discover instead an additional set of categories. Such is the stuff that tourist typologies are made of'. As taxonomies do not make assertions, they cannot be judged true or false. Like tools, they may be found more or less useful for a particular purpose

(e.g., tourism marketing and management strategies). As I will discuss below, the scholars who started this debate had something very different in mind from trying to classify tourists. The descriptions of 'ideal type' tourists as (secular) pilgrims or hedonists, however, are related to broader visions of contemporary society. They are best conceived as a concept-metaphor. Henrietta Moore defines concept-metaphors as 'a kind of conceptual shorthand... They are domain terms that orient us towards areas of shared exchange, which is sometimes academically based... Their exact meanings can never be specified in advance—although they can be defined in practice and in context—and there is a part of them that remains outside or exceeds representation' (Moore 2004:73).

Concept-metaphors act as framing devices, and as such, they are perspectival. The advantage of using them is that they facilitate comparison. The problem with concept-metaphors such as 'secular pilgrim', however, is that by their nature they continue to have a shifting and unspecified tie to physical relationships in the world. As Moore (2004) argues:

*If concept-metaphors are to be relevant in a disciplinary context then they must connect to the construction of composite theories. Composite theories are those that contain ontological, epistemological and empirical claims. Concept-metaphors that merely act as*

*a descriptive gloss or posit causal forces that remain unexamined are essentially suffering — at the very least — from under-theorization (p. 80)*

In order to answer the research probe properly, we thus need to assess the composite theories underlying the concept-metaphors and the ontological, epistemological and empirical claims they make.

### **The Tourist as Concept-Metaphor**

*Of all the metaphors used to capture the postmodern condition, none has perhaps been employed more frequently than that of 'the tourist'. Just as modernity had its metaphor of 'the traveller', seeking the rational goal of educational improvement, the moral path of spiritual renewal, the scientific and imperialistic exploration of unknown territories, so too did post modernity seize upon the tourist as connotative of a dilettante life of fun in the sun and hedonism ad libitum in placeless destinations where the 'other' was cheerfully ignored in favour of the unbridled pursuit of individualism sans frontières. (Dann 2002: 6)*

Although Dean MacCannell (1976) did not coin the term 'secular pilgrim', he did provide the theoretical context to conceptualize the tourist as a secular pilgrim in quest of authenticity. Comparing tourism with pilgrimage, he writes:

*The motive behind a pilgrimage is similar to that behind a tour: both are quests for authentic experiences. Pilgrims attempt to visit a place where an event of religious importance actually occurred. Tourists present themselves at places of social, historical and cultural importance. (MacCannell 1973: 593)*

Importantly, MacCannell begins his seminal monograph, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, by specifying that he means two different things by tourist: (1) an 'actual person' and (2) a 'model for

modern-man-in-general' (1976:1). The notion of 'secular pilgrim' is related more closely to the second meaning. In other words, the description of tourist as (secular) pilgrim functions as a concept-metaphor. It is not so much about what a tourist does and is, as tourist, but how the figure of the tourist is emblematic for the times in which we live. This important distinction seems lost in the piece of Knox & Hannam. They argue that 'contemporary tourism is now so diverse that the original terms of the opposition set up between secular pilgrims and hedonists arguably no longer apply. There is little difference between pilgrims and tourists and many pilgrimages are hedonistic'. That was, of course, not the point of the original argument.

Inspired by Emile Durkheim's study of primitive religion and Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology, MacCannell sees tourism as an icon of the rootlessness and alienation of modern life. The search for meaning in (secularized) modern societies encourages pilgrimage to the sites of differentiation created by modernity and a search for the 'primitive' and pre-modern cultures it has displaced—a quest for 'authenticity' that is ultimately doomed as it is hindered by locals and tourism service providers that stage reality and 'real live' as mere attractions. MacCannell's work is thus an 'ethnography of modernity' (1976:2) in which tourism functions as a modern surrogate religion in connection with mass leisure.

MacCannell's theory is partially a reaction to the earlier work of Boorstin (1964), for whom tourism is essentially an aberration, a trivial, frivolous, superficial, and vicarious activity. Boorstin bemoans the disappearance of the travelling of yesteryear, which was an

individual, painstaking and educational experience. He believes that modern (mass) tourists are no more than sheer hedonists, unable to experience reality directly, thriving on and finding pleasure only in the inauthentic and, therefore, taking pleasure in contrived experiences, attractions and 'pseudo-events' created by tourism service providers and the media. Early on in the debate, Cohen (1979), points out that it is inaccurate to assume that all tourists are either dopes or secular pilgrims. According to him, most are simply out to have a good time—'travelling for pleasure'. Only a few, of the non-institutionalized variety (also known as 'independent travellers'), look for meaning in their lives by touring the world inhabited by the 'Other'.

The use of the tourist as a metaphor for larger societal developments has also been popular outside of tourism studies. According to Appadurai, for example, tourists metaphorically represent 'the shifting world in which we live' (1996:33). Bauman (1996) takes the pilgrim as emblematic of modernity, the tourist of post-modernity: 'in the same way as the pilgrim was the most fitting metaphor for the modern life strategy preoccupied with the daunting task of identity-building, the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player offer jointly the metaphor for the postmodern strategy moved by the horror of being bound and fixed' (Bauman 1996:26). For Bauman, the main difference is situated in the kind of mobility that characterizes tourism:

*The tourist moves on purpose (or so he thinks). His movements are first of all 'in order to', and only secondarily (if at all) 'because of'. The purpose is new experience; the tourist is a conscious and systematic seeker of experience, of a new and different experience, of the experience of difference and novelty—*

*as the joys of the familiar wear off and cease to allure. The tourists want to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element (a pleasant feeling, a tickling and rejuvenating feeling, like letting oneself be buffeted by sea waves)—on condition, though, that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish (Bauman 1996:29).*

### The Tourist as Pilgrim

*One needs to move beyond the Turnerian structural approach in an appreciation of the poststructuralist developments that have influenced sociology and anthropology during the 1980s. Nonessentialist accounts of tourism need to be explored, making use of recent pilgrimage studies focusing on the deconstruction of such unitary categories as pilgrim and tourist. Behind the superficial analogies between pilgrimage and tourism, there lies a more complex world of dissonance, ambiguity, and conflict that one is now beginning to explore through the analysis of official attempts to organize people's activities and beliefs and unofficial resistance to the power of those who claim to know what is both right and good (Eade 1992: 31).*

Many scholars have characterized tourism metaphorically as 'pilgrimages' (something scholars of religion have repeatedly criticized). Some seem to suggest that tourism evolved out of pilgrimage. While tourist, as a concept, only appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century in English and French, one can identify people most of us would call tourists, as well as their actions, long before that. The term itself, derived from the Greek *tornos* (a carpenter's tool for drawing a circle), refers to an individual who makes a circuitous journey (usually for pleasure) and returns to the starting point. Pilgrim, on the other hand stems from the Latin *peregrinus*, which originally meant foreigner, wanderer, exile, and traveller, as well as newcomer and stranger. The meaning of pilgrimage historically developed to become 'a journey

claimed to be undertaken for reasons involving religious sacrifice' (Palmer et al. 2012: 71). Others use a much broader definition, making the difference with tourism become much smaller: '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).

The metaphorical conceptualization of tourists *as* pilgrims, like many other aspects of tourism (Salazar 2013), has largely been influenced by the work of anthropologists (Badone and Roseman 2004). Victor and Edith Turner famously wrote that 'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (1978:20). According to the Turners, pilgrimage, like tourism, is organized, bureaucratized and uses the same infrastructure mediated by travel agencies. They see evident links between tourism and pilgrimage in terms of both the journey and the experience of *communitas*, although they distinguish between the obligatory nature of many traditional rituals and the voluntary nature of tourism. Victor Turner himself notes that the simultaneous rise of the anthropology of tourism along with that of pilgrimage is no accident, since both areas of study have become metaphors for a world on the move, 'where rapid transportation and the mass media are moving millions literally or mentally out of the stasis of localization' (1992: viii).

In a Durkheimian tradition, Graburn (1978, 1983) maps tourism to Victor Turner's tripartite structure of *rites of passage*, situating the tourist's quest as a pursuit of the 'sacred' (non-ordinary), as separate from the 'profane' (ordinary). Importantly, tourists are being metaphorically compared to pilgrims as being on a 'sacred journey'. Tourism is seen as a secular and universal equivalent of

religion operating in non-ordinary time: 'even when the role[s] of tourist and pilgrim are combined, they are necessarily different but form a continuum of inseparable elements' (Graburn 1983: 16). Even history-distorting theme parks such as Disney World have been viewed as contemporary secular equivalents to traditional centres of faith, where the icons of civil religion are ritually worshipped and consumed (Moore 1980). Pfaffenberger (1983) sees present-day tourism arising out of a long tradition of religious pilgrimage. At the same time, he opposes serious (pious) pilgrims against frivolous (hedonistic) tourists. According to Colin Turnbull, too, tourists travel for 'hedonistic purposes'. Pilgrims, on the other hand gain 'a sense of belonging to a religious or spiritual heritage rather than a cultural one' (1981: 14).

In a special issue of *Annals of Tourism Research* on the relationships between pilgrimage and tourism, Valene Smith argues that 'tourist encounters can be just as compelling [as pilgrimage] and almost spiritual in personal meaning' (1992: 2). She sees social approval as the most important factor differentiating tourists from pilgrims. Her observation, similar to the Turners (Turner and Turner 1978), infers that from a tourism perspective there is (superficially) no difference between tourists and pilgrims: they share leisure time, income, and social sanctions for travel and, in most instances, the same infrastructure. Pilgrimage and tourism may be conceptualized as 'two parallel, interchangeable lanes' (Smith 1992: 15). People can 'travel either lane, or switch between them, depending on personal need or motivation, and as appropriate to time, place, and cultural circumstances' (Smith 1992: 15). Smith relies on Durkheim to link pilgrimage to the sacred and tourism to the secular and, in between these two, religious

tourism, which is related to the profane. In that same special issue, John Eade (1992) calls to reconstruct the terms tourist and pilgrim in order to capture the lack of harmony that exists between them.

Interestingly, Knox and Hannam never fully define how they understand the concepts of pilgrim and hedonist. This allows them to ‘play’ around with the terms (e.g., discussing the hedonistic aspects of pilgrimage). Although they recognize the ‘metaphor of the pilgrim’, they seem stuck in a logic of tourism typologies. That is why Knox and Hannam argue that the ‘categories’ of tourist and pilgrim ‘have in some cases grown towards and overlap each other so that we can identify elements of the pilgrimage in hedonistic forms of tourism and hedonistic behaviour among supposed pilgrims’. Such statements suggest wrongly that there was a time in which ‘pure’ (and, thus, ‘authentic’) types of pilgrims and tourists existed. In addition, pilgrimage is imagined, in an evolutionary fashion, as ‘ancestral’ to tourism. On the one hand, Knox and Hannam seem to suggest that (cultural or creative) tourism has replaced pilgrimage (or, at least, the ‘original’ form of the practice). On the other hand, the ‘mystical and spectacular behaviour of the faithful’—the pilgrims who are still around—has become part of the attraction for tourists visiting religious sites.

Knox and Hannam write that ‘some tourists very clearly fall into the camp of being hedonists in search of pleasure’. This should come as no surprise. For most people, tourism involves more hedonism and conspicuous consumption than learning or understanding. However, with tourism becoming a phenomenon of the masses, the label of ‘tourist’ has received increasingly negative

connotations. Middle and higher social classes try to ‘distinguish’ (Bourdieu 1984) themselves by engaging in tourism activities that are esteemed to be of higher (moral) value (cf. Munt 1994). This strategy does not always seem to be successful. As Knox and Hannam note, ‘cultural tourism is no longer clearly separate from mass forms of tourism’. Importantly, hedonists and pilgrims are not two ‘types’ of tourists, but concept-metaphors that reflect the societal role that scholars attribute to tourism. Again, Knox and Hannam think otherwise: ‘That hedonists are in pursuit of pleasure suggests that the lot of the pilgrim, whether secular or otherwise, is somewhat more ascetic as they self-flagellate themselves from museum to gallery to heritage attraction’.

## Conclusion

Knox and Hannam end their piece by arguing that ‘while the twin concepts of pilgrim and hedonist continue to have some utility they are not sufficiently nuanced or all-encompassing to describe, let alone explain, the totality of contemporary tourist practice’. Of course not, because this would imply an essentialist stance according to which tourists should be classified either as (secular) pilgrims or as hedonists. As Cohen noted long ago, ‘tourism spans the range of motivations between the desire for mere pleasure characteristic of the sphere of “leisure” and the quest for meaning and authenticity, characteristic of the sphere of “religion”’ (1979: 193). Tourism overlaps with pilgrimage, but also with business, migration and other phenomena (Salazar 2010b; Salazar and Zhang 2013). The two descriptors of this probe capture the complexity neither of tourists nor, by extension, the society they are supposed to represent.

As I made it clear above, this is not a discussion about tourist typologies or, worse, tourism market segments. Instead of asking whether tourists are secular pilgrims or hedonists, we should be asking what we gain, analytically, by using these concept-metaphors. For whom does this matter and how does tourism (or at least the study of it) benefit by the use of these terms? The fruitfulness of the original theoretical discussion is that it opened up an in-depth reflection on the nature of tourism in relation to the wider socio-economic context in which it develops. The role of concept-metaphors such as ‘secular pilgrims’ is to ‘open up spaces for future thinking’ (Moore 2004: 74). Their ‘purpose is to maintain ambiguity and a productive tension between universal claims and specific historical contexts’ (Moore 2004: 71). As the text by Knox and Hannam illustrates, however, the concepts have started to lead their own life and have almost become ‘tourism imaginaries’ (Salazar 2012;

Salazar and Graburn 2014) in their own right — socially transmitted representational assemblages that are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices in tourism and beyond.

Despite my criticism and reservations, there is one point on which I wholeheartedly agree with Knox and Hannam, namely, that ‘this is a highly situated, contingent and Eurocentric debate that fails to take account of tourist practices outside of the Western World’. Indeed, this conceptual discussion has been dominated since the very start by Western scholars and this research probe is a failed opportunity to open up the debate more globally. A similar argument could be made when it comes to gender. These criticisms seriously weaken the universal validity of the arguments made. Or, as Graham Dann argues, ‘because the iconicity of metaphor depends on cultural codes, and cultures themselves vary, there can be no universal metaphors’ (2002: 1).

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