

François Cazaux

To be a pilgrim: A contested identity on Saint James' Way

Abstract

Saint James' Way, after having almost disappeared from memory in the 20th century, has been the object of renewed interest over the last twenty years or so, becoming one of the most highly publicised pilgrimage routes of our time. Structured and institutionalised since the Middle Ages, this pilgrimage path is today, as in the past, at the origin of a prosperous economy in the regions it crosses. However, it is far from these considerations that, each year, an increasing number of individuals decide to leave their home to go walking towards the apostle's grave. Considering the tension between tradition and modernity, in this paper I will analyse the extent to which this "invented" space is at the same time a source of dissent between the different actors, while crystallizing the expectations, hopes and doubts of thousands of individuals in Western society, individuals who constantly redefine this space by endowing a new identity, the one of pilgrims of Saint James.

Key words:

pilgrimage; pilgrim; identity; contestation; Saint James Way; Camino francés; Spain

Introduction

At six o'clock, suddenly and unexpectedly, the lights turned on. And while Paul, a forty-year old sporty-looking man asks that we turn them off, a young German next to us curses. The *hospitaliero* announces it is time to leave. Less than one hour later, pilgrims have packed up and left the *albergue*. But, as there is no possibility to have breakfast, neither in the *albergue* nor in town, standing up in front of the door, the *hospitaliero* gives everyone an advertisement for a bar located in the next village, about five kilometers further. A middle-aged French man expresses his regret: "It's the Disneyland of charities!" From the sheepfold of Roncesvalles, (transformed nowadays into a vast, one hundred-eighty bed dormitory) 753 km separate us now from Santiago de Compostela. For some, the journey has begun weeks and sometimes months ago, for others, it starts here. This would be the first contact they have with those who will accompany them for days or weeks, the first moment of awareness of the life — as ephemeral as it is — to which they have freely chosen to be exposed. It is raining outside, and about thirty kilometers separate us from the next *albergue* where the number of places is reduced. Heads down, the pilgrims move forward, hurtling toward their destination hoping to find an available bed.

For more than twenty years, Saint James' Way has been the object of a renewed interest on behalf of persons from diverse horizons, from Europe or other continents,

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Catholics, atheists or the faithful of other confessions: individuals who intend to walk in the steps of former pilgrims. "The pilgrim's condition," as Alphonse Dupront writes, "is to follow and to pursue" (1967, p. 108), to create, *de facto*, a spatial and temporal link with others, leading to the formation of a community whose members day after day feel themselves separate from the world around them. For what reasons do thousands of men, women and even children choose to spend many days crossing a distance which modern means of transportation would allow to reach in few hours? And, if, as Victor Turner writes "the traditional way of going to a major pilgrimage center is very important" (1973, p. 227) what does the choice of exposing oneself to the pain and the difficulties that such an experience provides mean? Can we perceive in it a return of the religious, or is it an alternative way of spending a vacation, a sporting challenge, the mark of a particular interest in history or art, or even a therapeutic practice? Does that imply a discharge of the values developed in our modern societies, a means of facing the fear of the disappearance of the individual, erased through processes of globalization in which man — as a living and thinking entity — has no more place, integrated into a broad system which limits (s)he no longer perceives? While the revival of Saint James' Way and the tremendous enthusiasm that the practice enjoys seem to contradict any idea of progress and to go against the modernistic trends in which the world seems naturally engaged, the roads to Santiago de Compostela present various faces and offer walkers the possibility of personally defining the meaning(s) they give to their pilgrimage.

Considering the tension between tradition and modernity, in this paper I will first describe some of the processes and the mechanisms, which, from the pilgrimage's origins to the contemporary revival, have led to the establishment of this particular space. Then, I will focus on the contemporary pilgrimage, trying to confront, on one hand, how it can be seen from an external point of view and, on the other hand, what pilgrims say of their pilgrimage in order to understand how they live on the Way and how they perceive their experience. As John Eade and Michael Sallnow argue, pilgrimage depicts complex relationships between individuals; they note the importance of taking into account the discourses and practices, not solely of the pilgrims, but of all social actors who revolve around the pilgrimage and the place of worship to understand its significance (1991, p. 15). This will lead me to propose an analysis of the discourses and which multiplicity leads sometimes to the expression of conflicting representations of the practice. Quoting Bryan Pfaffenberger, Nancy Frey expresses the fact that the *Camino francés* — the way that links Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port in France, to Santiago de Compostela — fails "to fall neatly into the categories of pilgrimage as a 'serious' religious and sacred journey or of tourism as 'frivolous' travel" (2004, p. 90). The aim of this article is to connect these two conceptions of the journey and expose the fact that, far from being discrete, they are part of a whole. The pilgrimage's space itself is a source of dissent, but at the same time it crystallizes the expectations, hopes and doubts of thousands of individuals in Western society. Pilgrimage is indeed a complex, ambiguous and shifting phenomenon, a practice that has always managed to perfectly correspond to the expectations of its epoch, responding at the same time to the economic, political, religious and social needs.

On methodology

Data that allows me to propose this analysis was collected during three fieldtrips. I began my research in 2004 on the occasion of a Holy Year which, since 1322, occurs each year during which the 25th of July, Saint James feast day, falls on a Sunday following a periodicity of 11, 6, 5, 6 years. I departed on March 13th from the cathedral of Le Puy-en-Velay, reached the one of Santiago on May 19th, and then arrived at Fisterra, a little seaside town of fishermen located about 90 kilometers away from Santiago, which symbolizes the end of the Jacobean Route, on the 26th of the same month. On the French part of my journey, I followed the *via Podiensis*, which many travel guides boast is "the oldest known" route, since a bishop of Le Puy-en-Velay named Godescalc, the first foreign pilgrim whose coming on Saint James's grave is attested (Sigal, 1982, p. 163), went to Santiago de Compostela during the year 950. It is also the most frequented route by contemporary pilgrims in France, as it is one of the best-equipped and also the most prestigious since the *Camino's* revival among foreign travelers (those originating from northern Europe in particular) whose guide books do not always mention other routes. Then, like 80% of pilgrims, I reached Santiago by the *Camino francés*, where I completed a second field survey from July 17th to August 18th, 2008. For my third fieldtrip in 2010, during another Holy Year, I decided to reach Santiago by another way. Leaving my home in the southeast of France on February 4th, I traveled on the *via Tolosona* which point of departure is the city of Arles, until the snow obliged me to stop. Indeed, in 2010 the route through the Pyrenees was rendered impossible because of the meteorological conditions and the passage of the storm Xynthia. By train, I went to Hendaye, close to the frontier with Spain, where I started to walk on the *Camino del norte*. Marked by a vast expanse of white sand that hugs the Spanish coast and the Cantabrian massifs plunging into the Atlantic Ocean, the *Camino del norte* is considered the most historic in Spain. I arrived in Santiago on March 31st.

This opportunity to accomplish the pilgrimage at various times of the year, following different routes and across several years, gave me the opportunity to apprehend the formation of the pilgrim community during different periods and to observe diverse modes of peregrination. Obviously, one does not go to Santiago with the same frame of mind and in the same conditions, depending on whether one chooses to walk in winter or in the summer. I have traveled thousands of miles alongside pilgrims. Thousands of miles during which together, we saw a succession of landscapes and people, of climates and ways of living, of accents and local products. An eminently sensitive experience that individuals live, questioning each of their faculties to perceive the world around them. Thus, I was able to observe the dynamics that lead to the formation of a pilgrim community by individuals whose daily lives I shared. A social body in which I fully participated, becoming a part of this set — would the contrary have even been possible? — not being regarded as an outsider, since the group itself was composed of individuals who are perpetually external to it. Convinced from the start that Saint James' Way would be the place of a temporary drift from a world judged too pressed, a space of total liberty, throughout the journey, pilgrims adjust their expectations.

As Victor and Edith Turner write, every pilgrimage carries the mark of the events related to the time that it was born, and it is essential, in order to make sense and understand each phase it crosses, to integrate the analysis the history that surrounds every period of its existence (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 23). Thus, I will briefly review the history of this pilgrimage. Indeed, it is in the continuity that the current practice of the pilgrimage keeps with.

Walking through history

It was in the early ninth century that, in the western extremity of Europe, the hermit Pelayus, warned by a bright star, discovered a marble grave hidden under thick brambles. Reported in a text known as the *Concordia de Anteaaltares* two centuries later (in 1077), the story spread: the relics of the apostle James — considered as the evangelist of the peninsula — were just found. Sentenced to death by Herod Agrippa in 44 AD, this confidant of Christ died by the sword, becoming the first apostle to suffer martyrdom. From Galilee, his body was transported to Iberia, crossing the sea aboard a stone boat guided by the hand of God.

This discovery must be placed in the particular historical context of Spain at that time, that of *Reconquista*. While the Christian armies had difficulty in delivering the peninsula from the Moorish yoke, the discovery of these relics provided Spain with a liberator patron saint, quickly considered as the champion of the *Reconquista* (Sigal, 1982, p. 165) — *Matamoros*, the Moor-killer. In a short time, legends and histories merge, giving birth to a certain number of texts, drafted then and compiled during the twelfth century into Saint James' Book, *Codex Calixtinus*, which intended to promote the image of Saint James in the whole Christian world. Then, in a few decades, the paths leading to Santiago de Compostela became one of the three most important pilgrimages of the Middle Ages, after Rome and Jerusalem.

However, the exact number of pilgrims who came to visit the sanctuary from the Middle Ages and during the next centuries cannot be confirmed, and recent historical studies cast doubt on the high number. Nevertheless, although it crossed periods of more or less intense attendance, Saint James' Way never ceased to be frequented until the end of the 18th century, and it is only during the 19th century that its frequentation gradually decreased. Despite some attempts to rehabilitate the pilgrimage, it was only during the 20th century that Saint James' Way experienced a revival.

General Franco was the first to restore the image of Saint James in honor. In 1936, he became the chief of a nationalist opposite movement to the *Frente Popular*. Concerned about conserving a positive image among those fighting to maintain a strong Spanish identity tied with Catholicism, Franco became the instigator of two major studies on the pilgrimage (Vazquez de Parga, Lacarra & Uría Ríu, 1948-1949; Huidobro y Serna, 1949-1951), while, at the same time, Santiago was declared the patron of Spain. In France, it is the cultural impact of pilgrimage in medieval times which interest scholars such as Emile Mâle (1922) and Joseph Bédier (1926) in the early twentieth

century. Politically, common interests maintain links between both countries through the figure of the apostle, particularly in confronting the growing influence of Germany. But the sound of boots destroyed these attempts, and it is only at the end of World War II that the city of Santiago de Compostela and the pilgrimage to the apostle's grave experienced a spectacular revival, supported by the desire to unify the countries of a continent that was ravaged by the horrors of war (Frey, 1998, p. 239). Several organizations, first in France, then in Spain, were created with the same main objective of investigating and restoring the cultural and architectural heritage of the *Camino*, as well as moving Spain, which was excluded from the ONU (until 1955), closer to the French Catholic circles (Péricard-Méa, 2002).

However, during the 1960s, most pilgrims came to the apostle's grave *via* car or bus, following the signs set up by the Spanish government along the *Nacional 120* which goes through Spain. Others arrived by air, and sometimes by boat. But from the end of the 1970s, an idea spread: that the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela has to be done on foot. As a need to return to their roots, it is the "traditional" route of medieval pilgrims that contemporary pilgrims want to follow. But Franco died in 1975, and his disappearance sounded, for a while, the death knell of governmental support for Saint James' revival in Spain. It is through the Friends of the *Camino* Organizations in Spain and across Europe that the reanimation work continues. In March 1982, an initial request of institutional recognition sent by the Spanish association *Amigos de los Pazos* to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe led the Council of Europe to qualify all the Saint James' Ways as the "First European Cultural Route" in October 1987, inciting the authorities to restore roads, to maintain them and to develop hosting structures. European subsidies stream in and other Saint James' Ways seem to appear almost everywhere throughout Europe. Spain succeeded in getting the *Camino francés* registered on the list of the World Heritage in 1993. Described as a "linear cultural landscape running from the passes in the Pyrenees to the city of Santiago de Compostela itself. (UNESCO, 1997, p. 25)," it differs from the four ways in France whose historical value has long been disputed. On the occasion of the 22nd session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (December 2nd, 1998), seventy-one French cultural monuments and seven sections of the GR 65 — the path that goes from Le-Puy-en-Velay to Roncesvalles, representing 20 % of the 762 kilometers which cover the road — were registered as the "Roads of Santiago de Compostela in France" (Pericard-Mea, 2010).

Even if the figures are disputed once again (Bertrand, 2009, p. 9), each year an average number of four to eight million visitors spend a few hours or even several days in Galicia's capital, about two hundred thousand of them having made the journey by foot, by bike or on horseback.

Saint James' Way: A contemporary pilgrimage

In spite of few previous studies, it is not until the early 1970s that anthropologists became interested in pilgrimage. According to Simon Coleman (2002), the main reason for such a denial lays in the fact that the practice does not fit into the ideal concep-

on of traditional ethnographic field research, which focuses its attention, writes Alan Morinis, on "fixed socio-cultural units" (1992, p. 2). But new means of communication and transportation have considerably transformed our perception of the world. Victor Turner, as such, notes that the anthropology of pilgrimage is developing in parallel with the anthropology of tourism. Until the 1990s, most anthropologists focused their attention on holy shrines, forgetting the journey that leads to it. Yet, when one pays attention to Saint James pilgrims' motivations, it is clear that it is not so much Santiago but the Way itself that represents the goal of this journey: "What's important is not Compostelle, it's the Way and what happen on it" I was told by Gérard, the founder of a website and author of several guides on the *Camino* (personal communication, November 2010). A way that may be presented as a delimited place, a spatio-temporal frame which is a real space of life where nothing lacks in the pilgrims' needs, who deviate from the path only on rare occasions.

A STRUCTURED SPACE

The rediscovery of Saint James' Way immediately led to an important structuration of space. The first consequence is the establishment of a clear and defined path that is susceptible to some modifications according to needs but is, overall, relatively fixed. This sometimes gives pilgrims the feeling that they progress in a "large tunnel", sometimes, the term "corridor" is preferred to describe the Way (personal fieldnotes and communications). A space where pilgrims need a kind of passport, called *credencial*: a cardboard booklet on which stamps are affixed certifying the passage of the pilgrim in the *albergues*. Only pilgrims walking and cycling can carry a *credencial* and have access to host facilities in Spain (pilgrims who travel by car or bus are theoretically not allowed to benefit from this host network). This notebook is the only document that is asked of pilgrims in order to be recognized, to get access to the *albergues* (lodges) and, at the end, to receive the *Compostela* — the document that certifies that they have completed the pilgrimage. To get the Compostela, only the last hundred kilometres must be made by walking, two hundreds by bike, a distance considered sufficient by the Church so that pilgrims provide some effort, while allowing the greatest number to do the pilgrimage, (personal communication with an employee in the *Oficina del peregrino*, August 2008).

The pilgrimage to Santiago can be done at any time of the year. Nevertheless, if we consider the statistics provided by the *Oficina del Peregrino*, the Pilgrim's Office in Santiago, we can see that the pilgrimage is very much a seasonal activity. Most of the traffic (80%) takes place from April to October (with peak attendance during the months of June, July and August). During this period, most bars, restaurants, grocery stores and other service activities are available to pilgrims, employing a foreign workforce in order to help support the heavy workload in villages where the number of beds offered to pilgrims sometimes exceeds those of residents. There is a wide range of host facilities for pilgrims. When I started my research on this pilgrimage, I sometimes slept on the floor, lying on dubious mattresses. Showers in Spain, often few in number compared

to the number of pilgrims (from two to four showers for a hundred of pilgrims) were taken in cold water; the day's clothing had to be hand washed. In 2008, and more recently in 2010, advertisements for new host facilities draw attention to a greater quantity of showers and the guarantee of warm water. Washing machines and dryers have been introduced, the number of beds in the dormitories is reduced - some even offering double rooms for pilgrims traveling as a couple. In both municipal and private *albergues*, pools have sometimes even been installed, and now the swimsuit is part of the contemporary Saint James pilgrim's equipment. Thus, in a relatively short period the pilgrimage is evolving and changing rapidly and, even if the increasing number of pilgrims private lodgings are generally the result of a family activity (particularly in France), while public ones in both countries are run by municipal employees or volunteers, the growing number inevitably leads to a certain professionalization of the activity. Owners and municipalities who, in the past, were sometimes alone in their village to offer to host must now compete with real entrepreneurs. For example, in 2004, no shelter was offered to the pilgrims in the abandoned village of Foncebación except in the little chapel which remained open. By 2008, three institutions offered beds to pilgrims: one is municipal, the two others are private. Even a restaurant has opened its doors; waiters dressed in period costumes serve medieval cooking.

CONDITIONS AND TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

On the Road to Santiago, everything is done in order to provide pilgrims with the comforts they might need, an estimation which is constantly being challenged and reworked in order to correspond to the desires of most of them. Moreover, if we observe how pilgrims organize their pilgrimage, particularly in regards to the choice of its duration and in the discourse that follows it, we can see that the practice of Saint James' Way must be consistent with the prerogatives that modern life imposes on individuals. From my observations, the time taken to walk to Santiago is primarily chosen according to the place individuals occupy in their social and family life. Going to Santiago de Compostela reveals a desire to withdraw from ordinary life, but in order to come back stronger and better armed against their daily problems (see MacCanell, 1976; Graburn, 1983; Cohen, 1979, 1992a, 1992b). As Nancy Frey writes: "the pilgrimage [...] has been amply interpreted as an ideal way to enjoy "leisure with meaning" [...] the role of the pilgrim not as solely a religious traveller but as a more generalized seeker, wanderer, and adventurer became popularized and an ideal way to realize personal and social goals" (1998, p. 254). At any rate, they seldom wish to leave their lives definitively (amongst all the pilgrims encountered during my field studies, only one of them claimed that intention). Saint James' Way is a space where individuals can operate according to their own abilities and desires. Therefore, many ways of practicing this space exist. Contrary to what I thought before I started my research, very few pilgrims have enough time to accomplish the entire *Camino francés*, and rarer are those who, starting from Le Puy-en-Velay, will go to Santiago de Compostela in one voyage. So, for most of the pilgrims, the journey is divided into phases, shorter or longer depending on their capabilities and on the place they occupy in their social, professional

and familial environment — the duration being generally of one or two weeks. Some of them are alone and come back regularly, when they have the opportunity, in order to get closer to achieving their goal; sometimes it the project for a couple that can last several years, or the opportunity offered to all the members of a family to meet in a temporary but consistent way.

In a sense, Saint James' Way could be seen as a sacred space which nowadays becomes a tourist destination, a "transformation," writes Bryan Pfaffenberger, which "has certainly characterized the fate of pilgrimages elsewhere in the world" (Pfaffenberger, 1983, p. 60). Along the Way, thousands of shops sell pins, key holders, tee-shirts and other items bearing the image of pilgrimage. Some pilgrims may regret this commercial side, denouncing the commercialization of a process that they hoped could take them away from this system, expressing their disappointment by qualifying as "touristy" what they consider as a prejudicial change of the pilgrimage. Nevertheless, most of the pilgrims will go back home with one of these articles, which had been acquired on the Way or in Santiago, justifying their change of mind by the desire to bring back a souvenir for themselves, their family or their friends.

This evolution of the pilgrimage, in accordance with the obligations that modern life imposes on individuals, is a major point of contention between pilgrims and sometimes leads to the expression of negative judgments by external actors as shopkeepers, villagers and pilgrims themselves. Throughout my successive fieldtrips, a collective representation of the pilgrim seen as a humble, discreet, grateful, and self-sufficient individual emerged. In 2004, remembering the first years of Saint James' Way revival, the owner of a French lodge told me: "before, [pilgrims] slept in the barn because the hotels did not want them, while today everyone's hard. After the start of the season [that is, April and May] they are tourists who make a week [of pilgrimage] or are accompanied by cars, but I don't like this. They never apologize for disturbing when they arrive at some inopportune moments, when you are eating or when you are taking a nap. And there are days, I get ill when they arrive before noon, I tell them to continue because the house is not ready, then they grumble. Since I opened until mid-November, I have no Sundays, they are people who blow off your life, they think they are in a hostel!". Saint James' Way combines people of different ages and sociological profiles, of different nationalities and also of different wills, attempts and ways of doing their pilgrimage, a complex mix of individualities who have to learn, for a while, to live together and share their daily lives.

CREATING COMMUNITY

Many former pilgrims — whether they are still on the road, *hospitaleros*, or members of an association — recall the early years following the rehabilitation of Saint James' Ways, and express grief and condemnation towards what they perceive as the development of practices that are devoid of authenticity. Thus, André, a French *hospitalero*, speaks of a "dilution of the spirit of the *Camino*" (personal communication, Pilgrim's Office, Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, August 2008). Faced with what they see as a misun-

derstanding of the pilgrimage, and anxious to preserve the image and uses of the Way in accordance with their representations of the *Camino's* associated practices, *hospitalieros* sometimes emerge as guarantor of a particular spirit that mingles camaraderie, fraternity, simplicity, exchanges and listening to others — a certain vision of life where individuals must learn again, with humility, to fully be an actor in the world to which they belong. Even if the vision is collectively shared, the means and measures established may be different, depending on the *albergue* and *hospitalieros*. Next to the military organization that governs such *albergues* as the one of Roncesvalles where in 2008, the *hospitalieros* took a few moments to remind them of the rules listed at the entrance before giving pilgrims a headset and a bed. They imposed absolute silence past 10 pm, whereas other lodgings prefer a friendly reception. Although opposed in appearance, these two models offer pilgrims the chance to become aware of the community they are creating. The intransigence of some *hospitalieros* sometimes even unites pilgrims against their authority and the relationship between organizers and pilgrims which can contribute to the production of such cohesion. In some lodges, it is an inverse relationship which is privileged. In the little town of Grañon, about a week's walk from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, is the first *albergue* founded by Father José Ignacio. It is *donativo*; everyone is asked only to pay a donation. At the entrance hall, an open wooden chest is placed on a table. On the inside cover, a few words written in Spanish, French, English and German invite the pilgrims to leave what they can and to take what they need. Amelia, a Spanish woman of about thirty and Jean-Pierre, a French man twenty years her senior, are *hospitalieros* for a fortnight. As the pilgrims arrive, they explain the functioning of the pilgrim's *albergue*. Here, nobody asks pilgrims to present their *credencialle*, "the stamp is in the heart" says Jean-Pierre. Then, everyone are invited to take a mat from a pile and place it where they want to sleep; the downstairs room is reserved for pilgrims who want to wake up early and leave, and the doors being never locked. The will of the Father José Ignacio is to create a place likely to reaffirm or to initiate among pilgrims — who are sometimes confused after those first few days of walking — the feeling of brotherhood and unity that have to share the group, consistent with this specific "spirit of the *Camino*" that, following Father José Ignacio's desire, the *hospitalieros* are, in this *albergue*, the relay. For this, conviviality is the keyword of this stage: next to the piano some chairs have been arranged around a table in front of the fireplace, musical instruments are available, pilgrims gather around the musicians to sing or to listen. Here, the meal — from its preparation to the washing of the last plate — is the concern of all. In the meantime, in the common room, fifteen pilgrims set up tables and unfold chairs while others lay the tables with arms full of plates. In the kitchen, a half-dozen of them prepare the meal. At half past eight, the fifty-three pilgrims present this day sit at the table. Alternately, Amelia and Jean-Pierre thank them for their participation and wish everyone that this stage will enable them to regain the strength necessary to continue their "*Camino*".

The space-time of Saint James' Way is often perceived as a holiday space enabling individuals to leave the society to which they belong in order to find the moral and physical strength lost in the commitment of everyday life once again (on this point,

see also Cohen, 1979, 1992a). This representation is collectively shared by all the pilgrims I interviewed, Saint James' Way would be a means to "find oneself" or even to "find oneself again" (personal communications, August 2008). Nevertheless, seeking to understand why this space is endowed with such unique qualities — qualities that no other place in the world seems to be able to muster in pilgrims' words — no clear explanation is given to me. But observing pilgrims during their pilgrimage, listening to them, and analyzing their reflections have allowed me to understand the close relation they create with the path.

Phenomenology of the experience

Leaving one's home for days, weeks or months in order to walk toward Santiago, as numerous pilgrims informed me, is not so much indicative of the aspiration to transform oneself or to demonstrate one's disapproval with the society to which they belong, the pilgrimage becoming, as written by Victor and Edith Turner, a place of meeting and formation of a community in which individuals are linked by a common desire: the discharge of the social structures inherent to the political and economical system, a place to express protest, a demonstration of anti-structure (1978). It expresses even more the hope to live, or to create, an experience which allows the actor to experiment with a desired ideal of life that seems to be so difficult to experience during the course of one's daily life: that is, to demonstrate the will to do or to accomplish a goal by oneself and for oneself. This opportunity to recognize or to find oneself on Saint James' Way is made possible by the movement in which everyone is engaged. The physical dimension is overriding: putting one's body to the test allows everyone to realize their boundaries, their own strength. "Pain," writes David Le Breton, is "not a single sensory stream, but a perception that first raises the question of the individual relationship to the world and the experience to it. It does not escape the anthropological condition of other perceptions. It is simultaneously tested and evaluated, integrated in terms of meaning and value. Never purely physiological, it depends on a symbolic" (1995, p. 14). Walking for hours despite the injuries, being capable of doing it again, day after day, pilgrims learn to trust their body; each day becomes a victory over oneself as over the world around them. This physical dimension, this consented pain, cannot be separated from the metaphorical dimension associated with the pilgrimage to Santiago. Nowadays, very few pilgrims go back home using the same means of transport as for the outward journey. The notion of a progression is built in the discourses of the *Camino*. Alan Morinis writes "the essence of the journey is movement" (1992, p. 12); many pilgrims told me the importance of "going" from one point to another, which a classic hike does not usually allow. To walk to Santiago, pilgrims must leave everything behind them and, as days pass, go away from everything that rhythms and completes the ordinary course of life. Even the landscape and especially the orientation of the path, contribute to this appreciation of space. It is to the west that pilgrims walk, toward the setting sun; for the pilgrims who prefer the coolness of the night, it is under the Milky Way that they move forward. This metaphor of space is, in a few days, translated by many pilgrims I walked with through a phrase: "the *Camino*, that's life". These are words which have multiple levels of meanings it seems to me possible

to translate as follows: "the *Camino* that's life" — because one has to excel, every day, to take on oneself and find the courage to move forward, because the greatest source of satisfaction is having reached one's goal by having overcome difficulties. "The *Camino*, that's life" — because without others, without the relationships that are established, the daily victory would undoubtedly have little flavor. It is this tremendous capacity for social contact with individuals who, no matter what they are in the course of ordinary life, share the same desire to give meaning to values deemed essential, which gives the Saint James' Way its virtue. "The *Camino*, that's life" — because far from the constraints and obligations, far from the comforts of an organized, regulated and sometimes controlled life, the pilgrims have the sense of (re)discovering what being human means, learning every day to be more open, to feel confident with the others and with themselves, to regain their freedom. "The *Camino*, that's life" — finally, because here as elsewhere, friendships are made and unmade, because despite the etiquette all do not appreciate each other, because couples are formed while others break.

**The pilgrim:
Ideal figure of
the modern man**

In the villages they go through, pilgrims are welcomed by locals. Some locals cross themselves when seeing them, others approach to wish them a "*buen Camino*", or a "*buen viaje*" (a "good journey"). Everywhere, they are called "*peregrino*" — and treated as such. Special menus are offered to them in restaurants; when they leave the path and go astray, they are immediately redirected, and sometimes villagers take their car and pick them up in the middle of the forest: kindness, benevolence and the amiability of the Spanish towards the pilgrims touches them. Yesterday they were citizens, fathers, students, hikers, etc.; on the path today, they are, like all others, pilgrims. Without exception, this becomes their only denomination. A set of elements which, despite the fact that this identity can sometimes be contested between the pilgrims themselves, nevertheless contributes to create among individuals the feeling of belonging to the same group, the same community — a community of pilgrims of Saint James, evolving in parallel with the ordinary life, and one more time, through discourses, a common sense emerges.

When our focus is directed toward what motivated all these individuals to leave home in order to walk to Santiago, it is clear that religion is, in many cases, absent from their discourses. Pilgrims' motivations are not exclusively religious, and even when religion is not excluded from the process, it is not always faith that leads their departures. Although 42% of pilgrims in 2009 have expressed in the *Oficina del Peregrino* their religious intentions for traveling on the pilgrimage, more than half of them articulated the polysemous nature of their approach, mixing religious and various reasons. Pilgrims usually qualify their journey to me as spiritual, a term that allows them to establish a distance with the Church — whose history and authority is often contested — while claiming to "believe in something" and remaining enough open to be invested of several levels of understanding. Indeed, no precise definition of this term has been given to me. While for most of the pilgrims I interviewed, religion refers to a set of rules, submission being understood as a corollary of religion; by spiritual, pilgrims question,

both on themselves and on the world around them, about the place each one occupies out of any economic logic or high productivity, and on the relations among men, lamenting the lack of humanity in the latter. Contemporary pilgrims on Saint James' Way believe in a certain ideal: one of achieving a fully realized self here and now. Not that any of them dispute all structural values of the society in which they operate — Saint James' Way is often seen as an opportunity to do something that will allow them to return stronger in a society which, although it is demanding, is not so far denied. But everyone expresses the dissatisfaction in which the obligation to live in a world which rules tend to forget certain values they judge essential and drive people to forget their human side. Additionally, it seems that this search for immediacy in relation to the world has to be made close to nature, under conditions allowing a return to an original state. Destitute and needing nothing more than the few essentials everyone carries on his back, pilgrims move forward, at "human speed" (Frey, 1998, p. 74), giving back some matter to space and time.

As a refusal of an exacerbated individualism and rationalism which tend to atomize or abstract human relations in our society (Hervieu-Léger, 1990, p. 230), Saint James' Way appears as the possibility to integrate a community in which exchanges and recognition of others reign. A community which is both temporary, as it is effective, formed by the group of wayfarers, and imagined as Saint James' Way is rich with a long history, which — although it is not very well known in detail by all the people I met — gives actors the feeling of fully participating in the continuity of a social group in which past and present are one, where the pilgrim of today sometimes gets the feeling of being close to those of yesterday.

It would be tempting to conclude that Victor Turner was right — that listening to the pilgrims talking about how they are all equals, walking toward a common goal, sharing the same suffering, the same conditions, and that seeing individuals homogenize during the practice of pilgrimage, fully verifies that the ideal of *communitas* emerges on the Way. However, participant observation reveals large differences between the idyllic conception shared by all — that of a required brotherhood between pilgrims — and misunderstandings and disagreements that can be expressed within the group off-the-record. The main source of contestation between pilgrims consists of understanding what a "real pilgrim" is; sometimes one judges himself or herself to be somehow "more" of a pilgrim than others. Moreover, since the pilgrimage brings together individuals from various countries, cultural differences are often the source of discord. On Saint James' Way, everyone must reconcile his individual will with the needs of the community being created. But *communitas* and contestations participate in the same movement; to provide a coherent discourse on the practice. Despite the oppositions, away from the disorder of the world, it is a certain vision of humanity that pilgrims want to experience together, where friendship, sharing and respect are all that is proclaimed acceptable.

Conclusion

As Nelson Graburn writes: "there is no hard and fast dividing line between pilgrimage and tourism, that even when the role of pilgrim and tourist are combined, they are necessarily different but form a continuum of inseparable elements" (1983, p. 16), and many researchers have queried the links, points of approximation, and the differences these two forms of travel provide. Considering the revival of Saint James' Way, we have seen that different and sometimes conflicting discourses might emerge depending on the point of view we take into account. The aim of this paper was to penetrate the intricacies of this construction and thereby enable the reader to negotiate the slippage between the history of this pilgrimage, its recent organization and the travel conditions, to a more intimate understanding of the experience of the pilgrims who, through a set of symbolic reformulations and reinvestment, continuously redefines this space by taking on a new identity. In this way, I sought to highlight the sets of oppositions and reconciliations in action at different levels: between the group of pilgrims and the outside environment; between organizers of the pilgrimage — those who develop and maintain the *Camino* — and between the pilgrims themselves. Indeed, Saint James' Way is a space of contestation. According to John Eade and Michael Sallnow, the "pilgrimage is above all an arena for competing religious and secular discourses" (1991, p. 2), a space where each actor can elaborate a discourse on the pilgrimage related to his representations of this space, led by his interests. A multiplicity of discourses held by individuals who, for some time, will cross themselves and meet together, losing sight of themselves and then finding themselves again — sharing, despite the differences, a collective experience and a common identity (see also Peelen & Jansen, 2007). It is a fact that they all qualify themselves as pilgrims, even if they show no sign of special attachment to an established religion. Nowadays, as passenger flows increase, mobility becomes a symbol of modernity; Zygmunt Bauman writes: "the era of unconditional superiority of sedentarism over nomadism and the domination of the settled over the mobile is on the whole grinding fast to a halt", pursuing: "we are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement" (2010, p. 13). Pilgrimage is no longer conceived of as an exceptional practice; rather, it fits perfectly into the modern world (Coleman & Eade, 2000, p. 7) in which the development of transportation methods, communication advancements, and emergence of pilgrimage organized by travel agencies, make that pilgrimage site continue to attract crowds of pilgrims (Turner, 1974, p. 172). Indeed, in front of some *albergues*, one can read this inscription, translated in different languages: "the tourist demands, the pilgrim thanks". This is a moral appreciation, a caution to some pilgrims whose behaviors are believed to be inappropriate with the practice of pilgrimage. Pilgrims also use this term among themselves to denigrate the pilgrimage practices of those who do not do it in a "traditional way", such as walking long distances, wearing a heavy bag and doing it "entirely." However, what is significant is what people say of their experience, and it is the duty of the anthropologist to use categorization of their informants not only to expose what they express, but so as not to impose categories onto them. One last anecdote could exemplify my purpose. After about ten days walking on the *Camino francés*, I once again came across a group of Swedish students that I had met in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. Having fallen a little behind schedule, they decided to take

the bus so as not to delay their return. Before we parted, I asked them how they would qualify themselves. They (who in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, told me that they came among friends, for holidays, neither hikers, nor tourists, much less believers) answered my question with one voice: "pilgrims". And it is the same thing for the vast majority of people. After seven to ten days on the *Camino*, they are fully-committed; the identification process is at an end. Whatever their motivations or the way they choose to accomplish their travel are, being a pilgrim means, before all, "making" the *Camino*, "living" on it, feeling part of a group, and being recognized as such by both his "fellows" and those who are outside.

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