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To Pray and To Play: post-postmodern pilgrimage at Lourdes.

1.1 Introduction

Both the practice and the research of pilgrimage have undergone considerable change in the last few decades. The concept of pilgrimage has been extended from one of religious or spiritual inspiration to include many other quasi- and secular forms of tourism (Badone and Roseman, 2004; Shuo, Ryan and Liu, 2009), including inter-faith (Nyaupane, Timothy and Poudel, 2015), literary (Robertson and Radford, 2009), death and war (Dunkley, Morgan and Westwood, 2011; Hyde and Harman, 2011; MacConville, 2006; Hartig and Dunn, 1998), slavery (Yankholmes and McKercher, 2015) and sports centered activities (Ritchie and Adair, 2004; Gibson, Willming and Holdnak, 2003). Falling attendance at traditional, localised places of worship across all the major faiths (-31% attendance at Catholic Churches between 1990 and 2003 in the UK for example - Faithsurvey, 2017) has been mirrored by a rise in less traditional, individualistic engagement in postmodern touristic-pilgrimage activities to more distant locations (Damari and Mansfeld, 2016; Andriotis, 2011; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Palmer and Gallagher, 2007; Reader, 2007; Badone and Roseman, 2004). Timothy and Olsen (2006) recognized this transference and noted that contemporary spirituality can now be characterised by experimentation and hybridisation. While religious and spiritual pilgrimage has long been a topic of academic study the shift in practice has been mirrored by a shift in research that has undergone a refocusing from the physical aspects of pilgrimage, and the intended structuration of the experiences of many, to the study of the qualia of the individual pilgrim (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). However, it is argued that this has resulted in an ironic fixation upon the ‘tourist’ and a dismissal of the ‘pilgrim’ and that there is a need to return to attempting to understand the pilgrim’s religious identity (Feldman, 2017; Damari and Mansfeld, 2016).

This study recognizes this shift in practice and research focus, and attempts to further our understanding of the factors that individuals draw upon when constructing a personal meaning of their pilgrimage through a micro-ethnographic examination of the ‘lived experiences’ of twenty-four visitors to Lourdes.

It finds that a sense of *communitas* is formed around a common respect for the preservation and authenticity of Lourdes, and in navigating its spiritual and secular spaces, meaningful experiences are gained by both religious and touristic pilgrims. While the ‘actual meanings’ that individual visitors derive from their visit are as multitudinous and heterogeneous as the number of visitors themselves, there are several themes that pervade the stories that are

34 frequently told and retold, and thereby indicate the types of content that they draw upon when
35 constructing their account of the meaning of their travels. These themes comprise deeply *'lived*
36 *connections'* that the narrators have with the subject of the story, unexpected *'encounters'*
37 whereby events unfolded that were outside the pre-visit expectations of the pilgrim,
38 considerable *visual* content that may even include supernatural visions, and a degree of *curative*
39 or healing and supportive content.

40 These themes are more than mere descriptions/characteristics of their told and retold lived
41 experiences, they are hermeneutic reflections of the site of Lourdes and the apparition of the
42 Virgin Mary. Thus, modern day pilgrims appear to re-experience the events that are said to
43 have surrounded the appearance of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. It is these
44 *'Echoes of Bernadette'* that afford liminal experiences that are unfettered by the topological
45 boundaries of the site and offer the pilgrim deep-rooted, authentic attachment to the religious
46 and the historic. We proffer that the postmodern concept of pilgrimage as an individual's quest
47 for meaning is incomplete and that contemporary pilgrimage may be conceived of as a post-
48 postmodern search for spiritual meaning that is individually derived but is also rooted in an
49 authentic past.

50 **2.1 Pilgrimage**

51 The early seminal literature in the study of pilgrimage and religious tourism places emphasis
52 upon the objectivity (external and generalised) of the pilgrimage experience. Turner and Turner
53 (1978) present pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon, reflecting earlier interpretations by van
54 Gennep (1960) the French ethnographer and folklorist that view *"the overall sociological*
55 *features of the community undergoing a liminal process, or, the sites themselves (location,*
56 *characteristics and meaning)"* (Collins-Kreiner 2010, p7). The objectivity of early pilgrimage
57 research presents a view of the activity, whether religious or touristic, that centralises the site
58 as the object of significance. The work of Nolan and Nolan (1989) is perhaps the most obvious
59 example that examines pilgrimage through a structured, external, objective and generalised
60 lens. Their study presents the systematic inventory of some 6,150 pilgrimage shrines in
61 Western Europe, providing the reader with statistical evidence of the growth patterns and wider
62 communal implications of pilgrimage as both a homogenous activity and as a phenomenon that
63 is dependent upon location.

64 The intermediate literature is punctuated by the work of Smith (1992), Stoddard (1996), Santos
65 (2003) and the positions of Marnham (1980), Sallnow (1981), Eade and Sallnow (1991), Eade

66 (1991 & 1992) (competing discourses) and Reader and Walter (1993) (pilgrimage and popular
67 culture) that are opposed to the Turnerian view that *communitas* is a central and unifying
68 element of the process of pilgrimage. Marnham (1980), Cohen (1972 & 1974 & 1979), Urry
69 (1990) and latterly the work of Badone and Roseman (2004) were part of an academic
70 movement that advocated the ‘Similarity Theory’ between pilgrims and tourists (Andriotis
71 2011; Collins-Kreiner 2010; della Dora 2012; Palmer and Gallagher 2007; Poria, Airey and
72 Butler 2003). Similarity Theory is based upon the view that postmodern travel negates the
73 ‘conceptual opposites’ of pilgrims and tourists that was favoured by the early theorists and
74 proponents of pilgrimage studies. It is Graburn (1977) who first presents the notion that the
75 tourist was experiencing a parallel process with the pilgrim. He claims that both are
76 ‘metaphorically’ taking part in a sacred journey that is about self-transformation, knowledge
77 and status (Graburn, 1983). Eade’s (1991) study claims that pilgrimage sites, in reality, are
78 places of order, structure, power and conflict. Eade (1991), and the other proponents of anti-
79 *communitas*, while not totally dismissive of the Turnerian (1978) thesis, support a position that
80 place *communitas* as but one dimension of the pilgrimage experience. Smith’s (1992)
81 conceptual framework places tourists and pilgrims at opposing ends of a continuum of
82 ‘individual’ motive and meaning on which one is able to ‘artificially’ delineate the pilgrim and
83 tourist based upon measurable, conditioned and controlled points. He recognises that the
84 pilgrim/tourist continuum, potentially at least, offers innumerable possibilities for sacred-
85 secular combinations. This view is supported by Stoddard (1996) who puts forward a revised
86 framework that creates a central ‘intermediate’ ground termed ‘religious tourist’. The
87 intermediate position is, according to Stoddard (1996), the result of two separated phenomena,
88 tourism and pilgrimage, brought together in a central ‘interacting’ ground. It is this central
89 ground, according to Santos (2003), where most pilgrims/tourists are situated.

90 ***2.1.2 Toward Personal Pilgrimage***

91 The shift in practice of pilgrimage and realization of the importance of the individual in the
92 construction of its meaning has been recognized (Reader, 2007; Timothy and Olsen, 2006),
93 and some headway has been made in addressing the need to study the phenomena of
94 individualistic pilgrimage. della Dora (2012) for instance makes an interesting study of
95 pilgrim-tourists to Mount Athos and Meteora, garnering information primarily through the use
96 of semi-structured interviews and open questionnaires, supplemented by visitors’ books, travel
97 blogs and photographs. The study attempts to “*gain insight into ‘lived experiences’*” (p959)
98 focusing specifically upon how the real and imaginary boundaries in the landscape of the region

99 preserve the sacred or let it be “*contaminated...by technological intrusions from the world*”
100 (p971). The geography thus serves to differentiate and separate pilgrims, and their areas of
101 pilgrimage, from tourists, and their areas of tourism. Andriotis (2011) examines the
102 authenticity of pilgrimage to Mount Athos, employing participant observation and fieldnotes,
103 noting how commercialization and mass tourism are seen to erode the religious authenticity of
104 the location. Importantly, and citing Collins-Kreiner (2010), he also recognizes the importance
105 of the individual in the perception of authenticity, that it is dependent upon their own unique
106 and subjective perceptions. Later, Willson, MacIntosh and Zahar (2013) undertake a
107 phenomenological study of a single spiritual-tourist’s experiences of travelling to Peru (from a
108 sample of several such tourists to various destinations). The approach, in allowing the
109 individual to offer evidence that enables them to enunciate their thoughts and feelings, is found
110 useful in revealing fascinating insight into the effect of the individual’s wider life in their
111 construction of positive and negative meaning from a journey, or from an event within a
112 journey. Recently, Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli and Manual-Navarette (2014) conduct focus
113 groups with Kumbh Mela pilgrims in order to understand their motivations, actions and
114 experiences. In contrast with the majority of prior studies they find no touristic motivation
115 among pilgrims and suggest that pilgrims motives are driven by deeply spiritual devotions and
116 a need to gain spiritual knowledge from religious elders and leaders. Also in contrast to the
117 extant literature, especially in light of the presence of a “*pronounced level of social*
118 *stratification*” (p15), there is a high degree of *communitas*, although discord seems to have
119 been suspended rather than annihilated. Higgins and Hamilton’s (2016) contemporary
120 ethnographic work at Lourdes epitomises the importance of the individuals’ pilgrimage
121 experience when highlighting the ‘mini-miracles’ that may have a greater impact upon them
122 than the officially recognised miracles of the Church. They identify the *physical, social and*
123 *peaceful* forms that these events may take and the significance of the word-of-mouth sharing
124 of these experiences between individuals that act as a driver for further pilgrimages.

125 These studies are most valuable in furthering our understanding of individuals, the
126 interconnectedness of their lives and journeys (whether spiritual or touristic), the uniquely
127 subjective nature of the meaning of travel, along with the value of adopting methods of study
128 that elicit the necessary insight into those individuals. However, there is a need to take heed of
129 contemporary literature that points out that much of the postmodern research has lost sight of
130 the pilgrim. Wilson, McIntosh and Zahra (2013) remind us that the spiritual dimension of
131 tourism still remains under researched and has in fact tended to fetishize and reify the touristic

132 dimension of pilgrimage to the detriment of the spiritual to such a degree that the ‘pilgrim’ in
133 pilgrim-tourism research is “rarely mentioned” (Feldman, 2017). Inspired by these works, and
134 in order to address Collins-Kreiner’s (2010) observations of the gap in the current literature,
135 this study aims to focus its epistemological gaze toward exploring the experiences that
136 individuals draw upon when constructing personal meaning of their visit to Lourdes.

137 **2.2 Methodology**

138 In support of choosing Lourdes as a suitable research landscape for this study it is significant
139 that it is one of the few Marian sites to be authenticated by the Catholic Church (sites that have
140 developed in response to miraculous apparitions of the Virgin Mary). The site developed as a
141 pilgrimage center in response to eighteen apparitions of the Virgin Mary to a local peasant girl
142 named Bernadette Soubirous between February 11th and July 16th, 1858. It is now the most
143 visited (Lourdes, 2016) and probably the most important of the Marian shrines for the European
144 and indeed the international Catholic pilgrim community. There are an estimated 155 million
145 visitors to pilgrimage sites around the world per annum (Arcworld, 2017) and around 4 to 6
146 million of these visit Lourdes each year (Sacredsites, 2017). The site has seen significant
147 growth in the last twenty years as the Catholic Church actively promotes it as a pilgrimage
148 centre and not just a shrine as a means of “*restating the Catholic Church’s authority in a*
149 *secularising age*” (Reader 2007, p219). It is a notable place of division, contradictions and
150 complexity as pilgrims and secular tourists come together with multi-layered and multifaceted
151 motivations for visiting (Gesler, 1996). Lourdes’s historic, religious, social and economic
152 significance as a pilgrimage site, as well as being the context for several seminal research
153 studies (Eade 1991, 1992), validates it as an appropriate research topography capable of
154 advancing empirical understandings in the pursuit of generating new theories of the pilgrim.

155 **2.2.1 Data Capture**

156 This study adopts a micro-ethnographic approach (Fetterman, 2010) eliciting both ‘*in the*
157 *moment*’ and reflective biographical data from visitors’ ‘lived experiences’ participating at
158 Lourdes (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Blumer, 1969). Crotty (1998) suggests that empirical data
159 unearthed in this way should display a culturally derived historically situated interpretation of
160 the ‘social life- world’ from which accurate theoretical concepts can inductively emerge.
161 Therefore, individual meanings and values captured through a lived experience becomes the
162 foundation of the interpretivist’s nature of enquiry (Weber, 1970). This is because ‘the goal of
163 this tradition is to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of

164 those who live it' (Schwandt, 1994, p118). Following the lead of Blumer (1969, p39) the
165 study's methods aimed to 'lift the veils that cover the area of group life that one proposes to
166 study' by getting as close as possible to the lived experience of those involved.

167 In keeping with similar works in the field, such as Buzinde et al (2014), the lead researcher
168 'took up residence' for the entire eight days of an established Diocesan pilgrimage at Lourdes
169 during the pinnacle of the pilgrimage season (a diocese being a region that is under the care of
170 a Bishop). During this period the researcher was fully immersed in all group activity (official
171 and social), recording the 'life' of the pilgrims through participation, observation, and
172 conversation with other visitors, that were both religious and touristic (Samuel & Pettie, 2016;
173 Charmaz 2014). This process ensured that the research was carried out sympathetic to the
174 religious sensitivity and cultural norms of Lourdes's physical and metaphysical topography
175 (Buzinde et al., 2014; Grbich 2013 Maxwell 2013).

176 The time was spent with a group of twenty-five people, one of several such groups, from the
177 total Diocesan population of six hundred. The group comprised twenty-four pilgrims and an
178 official leader (Priest), who acted as the guide, coordinator, confidante, director, and link to the
179 wider Diocesan management and formal itinerary of the pilgrimage (for details of the itinerary
180 see Table 1). The twenty-four pilgrims were from a range of social and demographic
181 backgrounds and had previously visited Lourdes a number of times; one was undertaking his
182 first visit, ten others had visited multiple times, seven had visited more than ten times and a
183 further seven had visited more than fifteen times each.

184 [INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

185 Informal interviews were developed and used to explore and contextualise what the Diocesan
186 group observed and experienced (Fetterman, 2010; Kutshce 1998). Conversations with
187 participants were not pre-determined or structured but developed organically to address the
188 aim of this research: conversations were typically initiated with questions about 'how and why
189 have you journeyed here?' whereas many of the interactions unfolded without prompting and
190 required the researcher to act as an observer and scribe. The nature of some interactions was
191 shaped by the activities that were prescribed in the itinerary. For example, the daily processions
192 at 5pm and 9pm afforded opportunities to immerse oneself among the pilgrims on one day and
193 mingle among the observant visitors the next. Thus, observations were made not only of the
194 pilgrim-tourist divide, but from within both sides of it. Interactions took place in the Shrine,

195 Grotto and Basilica as well as in the streets, cafes and hotels of the area, as the stories and
196 experiences of the pilgrims unfolded.

197 Discussions, utterances and observations were recorded, as they occurred, in a series of
198 fieldnotes (Paolisso and Hames, 2010), a method that has been used in similar studies such as
199 Andriotis (2011), and longer discussions were recorded on a dictaphone. The fieldnotes were
200 used to inform the reflexive development of further lines of enquiry (Halcomb and Davidson,
201 2006; Lynch, 2000; Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955) and were a rich source of data that were
202 drawn upon during the analysis. While the focus of the study is the Diocesan group, the data
203 were captured via convenience sampling (Jennings, 2001) and reflects their experiences and
204 interactions with other visitors to Lourdes. Consequently, the analysis is made upon their
205 actions and reactions toward a variety of interactions and experiences, as well as the stories
206 and experiences of those with whom the Diocesan group interacted (participant demographics
207 and locations are identified throughout the analyses). The immersive approach enabled
208 conversations to incrementally evolve, becoming more varied and deeper as the researcher
209 became increasingly closer and intimate with the group (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1988). This
210 paper is subsequently built upon empirical data that captured the lived experiences of Lourdes
211 pilgrims and transformed them into '*textual expressions*' (Van Manen, 1990, p36).

212 Maintaining reliability and validity within interpretive research is a subject of much discussion
213 (Miles 1979). Some argue that it is achieved through adherence to declared-in-advance process
214 (Whittemore et al., 2001; Gronhaug and Olson, 1999) while others note the rise in the use of
215 reflective assessment (Maton, 2003; Finlay, 2002). By detailing the research landscape,
216 approach and spiritual position of the study we endeavor to imbue this work with a degree of
217 'recoverability' that "*will help to justify the generalization and transferability*" (Checkland and
218 Holwell, 1998, p17).

219 The data were thematically analysed (Guest, Macqueen and Namey, 2012) to identify dominant
220 and emergent topics in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach comprising, (1)
221 data familiarisation, (2) initial interpretation, (3) identification of themes, (4) collectively
222 reviewing and agreeing themes, (5) defining and naming those dominant themes and (6)
223 construction of the narrative of the analysis. In phase 1 the fieldnotes and recordings of
224 interviews were transcribed by the lead researcher in order to minimize misinterpretation
225 (Opdenakker, 2006) before being independently reviewed by each member of the research
226 team: salient points (phase 2) and dominant themes (phase 3) were manually colour coded.

227 Table 2 details the thematic codings that were identified by each researcher, then cross-
228 compared, before the final interpretations were member-validated (Sandelowski, 1993). Phase
229 2 presents the initial codes of each researcher along with salient quotations upon which they
230 were based. In Phase 3 the major themes are shown that each researcher developed: for
231 example, Researcher C identifies ‘wheelchairs’ and ‘the sick’ as belonging to the major theme
232 ‘Sick’ and differentiates these from ‘bereaved’ and ‘sad’ that belong to the major theme
233 ‘Tragedy’. Phase 4 arranges the major themes of each researcher according to common type:
234 for example, Researcher A’s major themes of ‘Gateway’ and ‘Spaces’ both reflect the physical
235 and metaphysical topography of Lourdes, and resemble the major themes of ‘Many Places’ and
236 ‘Interactions’ of Researcher B, and ‘Physical Separation’ of Researcher C. Phase 5 depicts the
237 final themes that were derived upon which the narrative is built (Phase 6); the overarching
238 metatheme of ‘The Pilgrimage Journey’ becoming the first section of the analyses and which
239 examines the events of the pilgrimage to Lourdes, along with the analytical themes of ‘lived
240 connections’, ‘encounters’, ‘visual’ and ‘curative’ that structure the analysis of the told and
241 retold stories of the pilgrims.

242 The research team comprise theistic and atheistic individuals, and this facilitated both the
243 contextually nuanced interpretation of the research landscape and the dispassionate analysis of
244 primary data. The findings and themes are thereby directly built from hermeneutical
245 representations of the structural experiences (Damari and Mansfield, 2016; Van Manen, 1990)
246 and the social contexts of the participants’ world (Blumer, 1969). Verbatim statements are used
247 throughout the analysis in order to offer an unfettered substantiation of pertinent findings and
248 are accompanied by summary characteristics of the respondent including age and gender.

249 [INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

250 Ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality is a foundation of ethical research (Duclos,
251 2017). This study employed fully informed consent whereby each participant in the Diocesan
252 group was provided with a ‘statement of intent’ that detailed how and why the study was being
253 conducted: gaining informed consent in ethnography can be particularly problematic since the
254 range of interactions and individuals that can become involved are innumerable (Li, 2008;
255 Burgess, 2007; Thorne, 1980). Verbal consent was obtained from participants that were not
256 part of the Diocesan group when they were interviewed directly. In all instances, pseudonyms
257 have been used in order to retain anonymity (van den Hoonard, 2003). Permission was granted
258 to identify the pilgrim group’s Diocese but the researchers have chosen not to reveal this in
259 order to ensure confidentiality.

260 2.3 Findings and Analysis

261 2.3.1 Meta Theme: The Pilgrimage Journey

262 *“If you take ten pilgrims you’ll find ten motivations for them: from those that are*
263 *going because they want to pray, from those that are going because they are looking*
264 *for a cure, to those that are going because their mates persuaded them.”*
265 [Andrew, 40+, Priest & Diocesan Leader, Interview]

266 As much of the seminal literature has indicated, there are many visitors to Lourdes whose
267 motivations vary widely. Tourists mingle amiably with the pious, some standing agog while
268 others squint less severely at the dazzle of the plastic grottos and figurines that adorn the streets
269 of the village (Swanson and Timothy, 2012) and successfully separate *“the sacred and the*
270 *profane forces”* (Damari and Mansfield, 2016, p203),

271 *You do see a lot of tourists in Lourdes and for some of them it is a shock to see some*
272 *very severely handicapped people...sometimes the tourists are quite emotional with it*
273 *all.*
274 [Barry, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

275
276 *If you truly believe in it and you have faith...this is not sacred...why would you come*
277 *here?*
278 [Alice, 50+, Tourist]

279
280 *...but there will be Catholics who are skeptics and you don’t have to believe in*
281 *Lourdes to be a Catholic,*
282 [Christopher, 40+, Priest, Interview]
283

284 Diocesan groups surge back and forth through the crowds as they attempt to keep pace with
285 their ambitious itineraries. Solitary men sit in the Pari Mutuel Urbains, their eyes fixed upon
286 the horses racing on the screens, hoping that their bet will finish first, while outside, the weak
287 and the feeble slowly navigate the tide of people hoping that their race is not yet run.

288 Yet, while picturing these visitors as occupying some position along a pilgrim-tourist divide is
289 conceptually useful, to arrange them according to rigid types would be incorrect. Their
290 motivations and expectations, in contrast to Buzinde et al’s. (2014) findings that pilgrims have
291 no need to fulfill tourist desires, are not just varied (Badone and Roseman, 2004; Smith, 1992;
292 Shou Ryan and Lui, 2009) but they are also varying, comprising touristic dimensions and
293 religious dimensions in degrees that differ over the course of a day as well as over the course
294 of their duration of stay. These observations reflect Eade’s (1992) suggestion that the meanings
295 that visitors to Lourdes construct are deeply personal and rooted in their very own
296 heterogeneity. One of a group of returning university students that had formerly been assistants
297 at the site captured the multifaceted nature of pilgrimage when he said,

298 *Why do we come to Lourdes, that is simple, to pray and to play.*
299 [Lee, 20+, Returning pilgrim, Interview]

300 The expectation that one should ‘take part’ when visiting Lourdes provides a template that
301 would seem to encourage a Turnerian (1978) *communitas*. Throughout the event the pilgrims
302 mentioned the role of the Church as the owner and creator of the formal pilgrimage experience.
303 It was seen as the dominant and controlling body, shaping what place and rituals should be
304 observed, and how they should be interpreted,

305 *There are social aspects but there are religious observances some people may not*
306 *like.*

307 *...but you are expected to take part in it...*

308 *...and quite frankly some people cannot stand it...*

309 [Derek, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

310 However, contrary to what a less immersive study may conclude, many of the pilgrims
311 expressed this as merely an element of their personal religious duty, albeit an occasionally
312 exhausting one,

313 *If you kind of go on the occasional Sunday you are now talking about a six or seven*
314 *day stint which is a lot of devotion.*

315 [Derek, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

316 Several members of our group pictured the itinerary almost as if it were a recipe for achieving
317 their personal goals and hopes. It comprised only a fraction of their sphere of activities and did
318 not appear to have any significant negative effect upon their overall perceptions of the
319 experiences. In their eyes, the events could be selected and attended almost at will, providing
320 it promised to satisfy some personal desire or need and, often more importantly, it was within
321 the means of one’s physical and mental capabilities,

322 *...and I just say to people that is part of it, and if you are not up for it? Then...*

323 [Eric, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

324 Some even emphasized that Lourdes itself, its apparitions and claimed curative powers, was
325 not a necessary part of their Catholic faith,

326 *...it’s not a doctrine, it’s an optional extra.*

327 *You can’t be thrown out of the Catholic church for saying I do not believe that Mary*
328 *appeared at Lourdes.*

329 [Dale, 40+, Priest, Interview]

330 This observation reflects much of the current research on pilgrimage that identifies that
331 although the church is still a key feature of the collective pilgrimage landscape it is no longer
332 the critical influencer of individuals’ perceptions. Rather, it is the pilgrim that subjectively

333 marks the site and its events that are both beyond the immediate gaze and beyond the Church's
334 control (Higgins and Hamilton, 2016; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Poria *et al*, 2003).

335 However, there is also an indication that the sociohistorical 'truth' of the site, that has
336 undoubtedly been maintained through the Church's controlling influence, is a key part of many
337 pilgrims' experiences. Even though the itinerary may be something of a 'pick and mix' of
338 activities it appears that the authenticity of those activities and where they are enacted is very
339 important,

340 *...on balance yes I do believe Mary appeared at Lourdes...I have thought about it lots*
341 *and now I have been here I am satisfied that Bernadette did see her, that she did*
342 *speak, so yes I do believe in the story.*

343 [Frank, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

344

345 *...(we) accept it...this is an authentic site.*

346 [Brenda, 30+, Diocesan Group Member]

347 The authenticity of the activities is also underpinned, for some, by the presence of someone
348 whom is perceived to be a spiritually authoritative or knowledgeable figure. These differ from
349 the brancardier (literally a 'stretcher-bearer', but generally an assistant) that are formally
350 employed by the Church to assist within the inner sanctum,

351 *It is a prescriptive church with certain rituals, people who are very much in charge*
352 *and want you to know who they are.*

353 [Grant, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Grotto]

354 Instead, they are seen as enablers of personal pilgrimage that remain truthful to the purpose of
355 the site. This resembles Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli and Manual-Navarette's (2014) observation
356 of the 'need' for spiritual leaders and elders, and as Damari and Mansfield (2016, p205) also
357 noted "*keeping the pilgrim within the bounds of the sacred domain requires the path is drawn*
358 *by religious people*". This was echoed among the conversations at Lourdes,

359 *...picking up the threads for everyday life...pulling it all together...that is what a good*
360 *pilgrimage director will do...that is what we are taught to do...that is what a tour*
361 *operator cannot do...not the same as a Priest.*

362

363 *On other pilgrimages again that advertise in the religious press which are basically*
364 *package holiday firms with a religious spin – the people who go on those will not*
365 *know each other and there's probably going to be less coherence beyond the general*
366 *desire to visit that country or that particular shrine on the tour.*

367 [Harry, 40+, Priest, Interview]

368 What the itinerary in Table 1 does not depict is the 'free time' that is cordially enjoyed by
369 everyone after the events of the day. It is also a time where a great deal of self- and group-
370 reflection take place and the rigors of the itinerary are considered alongside the spiritual

371 enrichment of the experiences. It is during these instances that these knowledgeable figures
372 play an important role,

373 *...the helpful thing that will happen normally is groups again that meet will have post-*
374 *mortems.*

375 [Ian, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

376 Evidence of *communitas* can be seen at Lourdes; both at the Grotto where pilgrims interact on
377 a spiritual level and in the bars where pilgrims, tourists and local residents interact in a temporal
378 and transitory existence. It is at this juncture where, not only do tourists and pilgrims come into
379 close contact in shared places, but many pilgrims become tourists, or at least more tourist-like
380 and exhibit greater similarities than differences (Santos, 2003; Stoddard, 1996; Graburn, 1977).
381 Thus, the contestation of space, albeit imperfect, becomes minimized as the various visitors
382 share in a more common purpose and a wider sense of *communitas* is fostered,

383 *...there is actually a lot of inter-mixing, tourists there perhaps with no religious*
384 *belief.*

385 [Frank, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

386 With some non-religious visitors even appearing to defend the sanctity of the area on behalf of
387 the pious,

388 *If you truly believe in it and you have the faith it shouldn't be commercialised and*
389 *hyped up and money made out of it like it is...there's nothing sacred or special*
390 *anymore...*

391 [Clare, 50+, Tourist]

392 Almost all of these encounters were punctuated with the telling of stories, and the evenings
393 especially became grand orations as events, old and new, were shared. Pilgrims and tourists
394 alike, remark upon the spectacle of such an enormous event and the emotional effect that it has
395 had upon them,

396 *I remember the first time, going up toward St Peters and seeing the people, and you*
397 *are now part of this massive outfit.*

398

399 *You get a tremendous boost now of not being this very quiet minority, saying 'well I*
400 *go to church' and you are actually able to walk about...it's quite energising.*

401 [Jim, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

402 Some tourists are dismayed at the commercialization of the area but still return,

403 *It stuns me every time I come here...It is like Blackpool with Crucifixes.*

404 [Diane, 40+, Tourist]

405 Meanwhile, the pilgrims are drawn by something deeper,

406 *...why do people still come to Lourdes...because Mary asks them to, because we trust*
407 *in Mary, because of the pull of Mary.*

408 [Andrew, 40+, Priest & Diocesan Leader, Interview]

409 There is perhaps a sense within the contemporary literature that postmodern pilgrimage has
410 witnessed, or at least a focused upon, the movement of ‘the pilgrim’ toward ‘the tourist’ to
411 occupy a middle-ground (Santos, 2003; Stoddard, 1996). However, our findings suggest that
412 there is an equal but opposite movement of ‘the tourist’ toward ‘the pilgrim’ whereupon non-
413 religious visitors display concern for the spiritual integrity of the pilgrimage site. Collectively,
414 they both appear to share a common respect for the preservation and authenticity of Lourdes
415 and thereby a sense of *communitas* is engendered.

416 *2.3.2 Analytical Themes*

417 After the excitement and turmoil of the trip passed and the objectivity of desk research held
418 sway once more, the startling similarities between many of the observed accounts became
419 apparent. Each contained, to some degree, characteristics that we have identified as ‘Lived
420 Connections’, ‘Encounters’, ‘Visual’ and ‘Curative’.

421 *‘Lived Connections’*

422 Many of the stories and experiences that were relayed to us comprised accounts of interactions
423 with other individuals that centre upon, but are not limited to, the physical space of Lourdes.
424 These had often occurred that very day, the chronological, physical and personal proximity of
425 the encounter (the accounts usually include the first names of individuals) seeming to add
426 credence to the event. It may also be significant that many stories centre upon the experiences
427 of non-religious individuals and their liminal awakenings.

428 For instance, one member of the group who had made numerous Pilgrimages to Lourdes told
429 his story of Pedr Clarke many times, to many different people, during our stay. His account
430 tells of his friend Kevin who witnessed a miraculous event,

431 *My friend Kevin was in the same hotel, the Astoria, as Pedr Clarke and apparently he*
432 *was singing in his wheelchair the night before.*

433 *Pedr Clarke went to his room and his feet started shaking, twitching.*

434 *The following morning he walked down to the Grotto.*

435 [Harold, 70+, Diocesan Group Member]

436 Interestingly, this account resembles several others that were heard being told, and retold,
437 among the Lourdes visitors throughout the duration of the fieldwork. Often the names were
438 changed and some details were subtly altered, but the basic event remained the same: a
439 surprising and miraculous event takes place upon someone that is personally, or closely known
440 to the narrator.

441 One non-religious visitor, Jason 60+, who had only been encouraged to visit Lourdes by his
442 religious wife, experienced a spiritual catharsis upon a chance meeting with a mother and her
443 child that also contained an important physical element. After being approached by the mother
444 who was loudly exclaiming that her daughter had been healed by her visit to the grotto that
445 day,

446 *I knelt down in front of this little girl and said “can I shake your hand” and so she put*
447 *her hand out. So I shook her hand and put my other hand on her head.*

448 [Jason, 60+, Non-religious visitor, Interview]

449 Even more profound perhaps is the experience of the man who happened to befriend the
450 Duchess of Kent during one of his visits to Lourdes following the death of his wife. The highly
451 personal nature of the encounter, as Wilson, McIntosh and Zahra’s (2013) work suggests is
452 important in the development of meaningful memory, is exhibited by the physical proximity
453 of the narrator to the Duchess of Kent throughout the story, and in the way that the Duchess
454 remembers and uses the narrator’s first name many years after their first meeting,

455 *This lady all dressed in white...no earrings, no make-up on, just plain... she turned*
456 *around and I remember her distinctly saying and pointing to the seat beside me.*

457 *Do you know she came back two years later. I got myself sat where she could see me*
458 *and she walked over and almost missed me and then spotted me and said “Keith, is it*
459 *you”.*

460 [Keith, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

461 **‘Encounters’**

462 The accounts of both Pilgrims and visitors also include strong elements of surprise and
463 astonishment within the encounters they had. Our male, 60+, non-religious visitor initially
464 conveyed surprise that he is actually at Lourdes, having been encouraged, he may have even
465 said coerced, into visiting by his religious spouse. He is also startled by the actual encounter
466 itself, the woman and child suddenly appeared before him claiming a miracle had happened
467 while he was merely walking about the town, and also stunned at the effect that this had upon
468 his spirituality,

469 *I know this may seem like a silly thing to say but I said “God bless you” – and then*
470 *instantly I realised he already had.*

471 [Jason, 60+, Non-religious visitor, Interview]

472 He appeared visibly shaken by the event as he conveyed his experience to our group, and then
473 to others in the hotel, and was seen to spend less time by himself over the remainder of the
474 stay.

475 While the story of Pedr Clarke tells of his amazement at his own physical transformation that
476 had taken place to him during his stay, for “[He] *kept stopping and looking at himself in shop*
477 *windows not believing that it was him walking*”, it is the reactions of some of the Diocesan
478 group members and the storyteller that are equally notable. The narrator was animated in his
479 rendition of the story and several people that had not heard it before nodded appreciatively.
480 However, several returning pilgrims had heard the story many times previously and they
481 interjected to reaffirm key points. Whereas the disparity in the details of these accounts could
482 be interpreted to undermine their authenticity, instead, their multiple origins seemed to
483 substantiate them. An elderly member of the Diocese even commented,

484 *I know this story, it's true.*

485 *I heard it many years ago...but it wasn't about Pedr Clarke. If my memory serves me*
486 *right it was a lady who experienced the miracle and was amazed to be walking again...*

487 [Nancy, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

488 The narrative of the Pilgrim whom met the Duchess of Kent is also startling in many ways. Not
489 only did he meet her after travelling in the wild hope of seeing her, but a very personal exchange
490 took place,

491 *She turned around and said “get closer to me” – well I was trembling with fear.*
492 [Keith, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

493 Further to this they continued their correspondence over many years,

494 *She threw her arms around me and she made me promise faithfully that I would*
495 *continue to write to her, and she gave me her address...and I wrote to her.*
496 [Keith, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

497 Their chance meeting many years later at Tarbes-Lourdes airport also seems to act as some
498 form of consolidation of the interpretation that the events were not merely coincidence but
499 were in some way ordained.

500 ***‘Visual’***

501 All of the stories that were told and retold also contained some powerful and moving imagery.

502 Many emphasized the importance (for them) of seeing the physical elements of the site,

503 *You are going to get a lot of visitors from the Catholic world visiting Catholic sites*
504 *maybe because they may see a Catholic Bishop or whatever.*

505 [Moira, 50+ Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

506 The ceremonial aspects of Lourdes are seen by many to be the most instantly significant and
507 memorable part of their visit,

508 *There is the torchlight in the evening, the big procession which is magnificent.*

509 [Len, 60+, Diocesan Group Member]

510 However, for others, the physical trappings of the Catholic Church can be a problem to see,

511 *I just can't understand it here, it all seems to be big candles, big processions..
512 that shouldn't be what it's about*

513 [Mark, 30+ Tourist]

514 Many of the topics of discussion among pilgrims and tourists incorporated some aspect of
515 infirmity and cure. For instance, the encounter between the non-religious Visitor and the
516 mother and daughter begins with him,

517 *...watching the wheelchairs being taken down by the youth into St Joseph's Chapel.*

518 [Jason, 60+, Non-religious visitor, Interview]

519 This is a significant feature for both the religious pilgrims and the tourists and one that
520 frequently arises during discussions. One returning tourist remarked,

521 *You do see a lot of tourists in Lourdes and for some of them it is a shock to see some
522 very severely handicapped people*

523 [Sid, 40+, Tourist]

524 This is an evocative scene that resonates with the historical and spiritual importance of Lourdes
525 as a site for healing. In a similar manner, the recounting of the appearance of the Duchess of
526 Kent as “*all dressed in white, no earrings, no makeup, just plain*” resembles an avatar of the
527 Virgin Mary that had been seen by Bernadette in 1858.

528 It is however the story of Pedr Clarke that contains the most startling supernatural and visual
529 content and resembles the mini-miracles that Lourdes has become most famous for (Higgins
530 and Hamilton, 2016). During the night when his “*feet started shaking, twitching*”,

531 *There was a picture or a photograph of Our Lady or Bernadette that started to light
532 up.*

533 *I saw the face of the Devil and it was terrible, horrible...and I also saw the face of
534 Our Lady...and gradually the face of the Devil faded and the face of Our Lady shone
535 through him.*

536 [Harold, 70+, Diocesan Group Member]

537 While the day to day sights of Lourdes are clearly important hallmarks of an authentic
538 pilgrimage for many, it is, once again, the visual content of stories that are told and retold that
539 resurface as the key components of individual's experiences. For a very small few, these may
540 be witnessed at first hand, such as the man that met the Duchess of Kent. But for many, these

541 are experienced third hand through stories such as that of Pedr Clarke. As explored previously,
542 it is the retelling of these stories, often with changes in important details, that, through their
543 retelling act as confirmations of their authenticity.

544 *‘Curative’*

545 Perhaps unsurprisingly for this location, the narratives were peppered with accounts of tragedy,
546 hope and miraculous cures,

547 *Is it a desperate belief that brings you here, because you are that ill?*

548 [Jan, 40+, Tourist]

549

550 *...to look after handicapped people that is the central bit of Lourdes.*

551 [Oscar, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

552 The bereaved Pilgrim whom met the Duchess of Kent mentioned,

553 [I have]...*been coming here for thirty-seven years, every year, even when my wife*
554 *died I came out on my own for twelve weeks.*

555 *I sat with her for two hours and she had me crying my heart out going through the*
556 *process of the loss of a loved one.*

557 [Keith, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

558 The scene that is depicted by Jason the 60+, non-religious visitor, even combines both of these
559 elements by situating the story of a miraculous cure alongside a “*wheelchair procession*”. It
560 must be noted however, just as some question the authenticity of the Marian apparitions, there
561 are many pilgrims that are doubtful of the historical claims of cures,

562 *In 1928 there was alleged to have been a cure, and there are stories from 1858*
563 *onwards, I’ll be totally honest in saying that I am a little bit skeptical about those in*
564 *terms of scientific and medical knowledge at the time, and whether people in the fuller*
565 *sense were actually cured.*

566 [Oscar, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

567 *Because of the advance of medical science, the standard of proof that they set, that*
568 *the healing has to be inexplicable, the more medicine knows the harder it is to show*
569 *something is still inexplicable.*

570 [Robert, 40+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

571 *I think it may (Lourdes) have got caught up in a contemporary thing – you know a bit*
572 *like the Spa thing.*

573 [Steven, 60+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

574 For others, even seasoned pilgrims, the sight and symbols of decrepitude are overbearing,

575 *Rather bizarrely they had hundreds of crutches hanging up in the Grotto.*

576 [Terrence, 40+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

577 These findings resonate with Higgins and Hamilton (2016) and Gessler’s (1996) observations
578 that Lourdes is a place where physical, mental, behavioral and spiritual healing takes place.

579 Despite the presence of doubt in many, it cannot be argued that it is the belief and hope of cure,
580 even if only of others, or only temporary (as identified by Higgins and Hamilton, 2016), that
581 makes a significant mark upon the experiences of all that spend time at Lourdes.

582 ***2.4 Authenticity: Echoes of Bernadette***

583 While each of the four analytical themes identified above are of interest in isolation by marking
584 those experiences that are meaningful to the pilgrims, collectively they point towards the
585 importance of the sociohistorical authenticity of the site. Through their own experiences, and
586 through the stories of others, modern day pilgrims appear to re-experience the events that are
587 said to have surrounded the appearance of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858.
588 Subjectively substantiating and perpetuating the Marian message is the common connection
589 that appears essential among these pilgrims in what we term ‘Echoes of Bernadette’.

590 We draw upon the Church’s historical account of Bernadette in order to highlight the parallels
591 with many of the modern stories that were encountered. Firstly, the Virgin Mary made herself
592 known only to Bernadette, for she appeared to no other person nor could be seen by those that
593 were with her at the time. This, coupled with repeated visitations over a period of five months,
594 gives rise to an intensely personal experience for Bernadette. In many of our discussions the
595 experiences are characterized by deeply personal, physical encounters. For example, the male,
596 60+, non-religious visitor’s spiritual catharsis that occurs between himself and the girl while
597 he places his hand upon her. Other stories emphasise the temporal nature of the encounter, such
598 as Pedr Clark’s nightmares that extend over the duration of his visit, while the bereaved
599 Pilgrim’s contact spans several years.

600 Bernadette’s obvious surprise at the apparition was mirrored by the townsfolk and the Church’s
601 astonishment and disbelief upon hearing her claims. Our pilgrims and other visitors
602 experienced similar surprise at their own encounters, and they also relate the surprise of those
603 around them. For instance, a lady at Pedr Clark’s hotel rushed in excitedly and exclaimed
604 “*there’s been a miracle*”, as was Kevin’s own surprise when he was later handed a newspaper
605 clipping about the incident that “*by the time I got it, it had been photocopied and photocopied*
606 *and photocopied*”.

607 The visual manifestation of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette is also vivid and dramatic, for ‘*there*
608 *came a dazzling light and a white figure*’. Most obviously, this is once again reflected in Pedr
609 Clark’s “*photograph of Our Lady or Bernadette that started to light up*”, but perhaps most

610 startlingly in the bereaved Pilgrim's image of the Duchess of Kent "*all dressed in white...no*
611 *earrings, no make-up on, just plain*".

612 The curative dimension of the storytellers' accounts is, as we have previously iterated, not
613 surprising, but is in fact only loosely grounded in the historical details of Bernadette's own
614 story. The Virgin Mary did not explicitly state that the spring water would cure the sick,
615 however, she did command that the waters be taken (as well as a herb be eaten). A friend of
616 Bernadette's was later said to have cured her dislocated arm by plunging it into the water after
617 Bernadette had made them run clear by placing the mud in her mouth. Despite this, the spring
618 remains a fundamental aspect of the site, to the degree that it features as a liminal gateway that
619 is not necessarily concerned with healing. Some perceive of it giving hope and succor,

620 *If there is a God that answers prayer, then now is the time, to grant a healing, but*
621 *quite often to give peace of mind, or of a sense of direction or consolation to*
622 *someone.*

623 [Dale, 40+, Priest, Interview]

624 In fact, it may be considered, at least by some, to be more important as a tangible connection
625 with their faith, or '*something deistic*' (Higgins and Hamilton, 2016, p29), than it is as a
626 curative device,

627 *The fact that, that spring was discovered at the direction of Bernadette through the*
628 *vision, makes it an integral element of the healing, whereas there are plenty of*
629 *shrines, even in Wales, where a well is said to have healing properties, but, there are*
630 *not many places where a well has been discovered in the context of a message from*
631 *God pointing out where the water is.*

632 [Dale, 40+, Priest, Interview]

633 *When you go into the waters, for me, it is more the uplift, it's more the mystical*
634 *appearance of your faith.*

635 [Vernon, 60+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

636 Previously, emphasis has been put upon the Church's management of the spiritual geography
637 of pilgrimage to Lourdes, that is, the inner sanctum etc. Undoubtedly, for some, a liminoid
638 experience occurs in this inner sanctum, particularly if a miracle is witnessed or happens upon
639 the individual. However, the liminoid space appears not to be constrained by the historically
640 determined and claimed space that comprise the spring and the surrounding area and basilica,
641 but extends beyond the sacred space and into the secular space of the tourist and casual visitor.
642 Our research advances Buzinde et al's. (2014) findings that pilgrims' motives for participation
643 are directly related to events that take place on site and suggests that such transformative
644 experiences can occur in any place, at any time and to anyone in a place that they deem is
645 connected with their activity of 'visiting Lourdes'. In keeping with Willson, MacIntosh and

646 Zahar's (2013) findings, these events that occur within the journey are significant in the
647 construction of the individual's meaning of their pilgrimage, through a process of self- and
648 group-reflection (Bosangit, Hibbert and McCabe (2015). What appears important for many
649 pilgrims is that these transformative experiences are rooted in their quest to attain spiritual
650 knowledge (Buzinde et al. 2014) and, similar to Higgins and Hamilton's (2016) recognition of
651 the importance of word-of-mouth storytelling, they are carried through the narratives and
652 experiences of others, which in this study are found to contain repeated references to the
653 sociohistorical 'authenticity' of the site and its connection with St Bernadette and the Virgin
654 Mary. It is by this means that the liminal capabilities of the site are carried within and without
655 the inner sanctum and afford meaningful pilgrimage to those that are unable to partake in the
656 physical act of taking the waters, and even to those that were not deliberately seeking to make
657 a spiritual pilgrimage.

658 Can it therefore be said that when visitors to Lourdes are constructing their own meaning of
659 pilgrimage that they are drawing heavily upon the experiences of others who are contemporary
660 avatars of Bernadette?

661 **3.0 Conclusion**

662 Pilgrimage is a constantly evolving term and practice, moving from purely religious origins to
663 include secular pastimes and activities (Badone and Roseman, 2004). The early work of van
664 Gennep (1960) and Turner and Turner (1978) for example, considered pilgrimage as a liminoid
665 and transformative experience of the many. In this era, it was the nature of the activity that
666 placed the physical site as the object of pilgrimage and differentiated the sacred from secular
667 tourism. It is the work of Sallnow (1981), Eade (1991 & 1992), Smith (1992) among others,
668 that begins to deconstruct the notion of pilgrimage as a singular sequence of events that results
669 in commonly-acquired experience. This postmodern phase of pilgrimage research recognizes
670 the blurred boundaries between religious and secular tourism and questions the significance of
671 rigid, ritualized pilgrimage in the construction of personal meaning of the experience.
672 Accompanying this shift there has been a concomitant change in the focus and methods of
673 research that have been employed. Nolan and Nolan's (1989) large-scale survey of pilgrim
674 experiences for example has given way to the more contextually rich examinations of Dunkley,
675 Morgan and Westwood (2011), Hyde and Harman (2011), Andriotis (2011), Buzinde *et al*
676 (2014), della Dora, (2012), Hughes, Bond and Ballantyne (2013), Willson *et al* (2013) and
677 Higgins and Hamilton (2016).

678 This paper endeavors to contribute to the emerging need for research that focuses upon the
679 qualia of the individual in the performance of their pilgrimage since we have ‘lost sight of the
680 Pilgrim’ in pilgrimage-tourism research (Feldman, 2017; Damari and Mansfeld, 2016; Collin-
681 Kreiner, 2010). In responding to this we expected to advance the postmodernist viewpoint that
682 rejects collective order and instead seeks individual, serendipitous experiences. However,
683 while our encounters have taken place with many and varied travelers to Lourdes, who have
684 many different reasons for being there, our findings suggest that they are bonded by an anchor
685 to a common historical and spiritual past that is told and retold through their stories.

686 These ‘Echoes of Bernadette’, that are characterized by their themes that comprise ‘lived
687 connections’, ‘encounters’, ‘visual’ imagery and ‘curative’ content, reverberate through the
688 years, across spiritual and touristic divides, to bring together a wide array of pilgrims.
689 Collectively they provide an authentic link to a common ‘truth’, or a believed truth, that moves
690 the act of pilgrimage beyond the postmodernistic pursuit of the individual and legitimizes itself
691 in the acknowledgement of the classical spiritual message of the Church.

692 In contrast to the Turnerian viewpoint, this study finds that the issues of contested space and
693 Church control seldom feature as a problematic issue in the utterances of spiritual or secular
694 visitors to Lourdes. The rigors of the formal itinerary are recognized, but they are either
695 endured or shunned, according to the needs and capabilities of the individual. Consequently,
696 they do not appear to be ‘landmarks of meaning’ but instead should perhaps be considered to
697 be ‘hallmarks of authenticity’ that underpin the sociohistorical ‘truth’ of the site. Those who
698 successfully navigate the contested spaces, and witness or interact in encounters that
699 thematically characterize the events that surrounded St Bernadette, appear to be partaking of a
700 pilgrimage that culminates in an authentic liminoid experience. In crossing this threshold, they
701 assume new roles and become storytellers themselves and thereby perpetuate the telling and
702 retelling of meaningful experiences (Damari and Mansfield, 2016). Thus, we proffer a
703 contribution to the theory of pilgrimage and a consequent neoteric perspective for religious
704 tourism research by declaring that it must recognize that it may be enacted in a post-postmodern
705 duality that accepts the freedom of the individual but recognizes their need for experiences that
706 are grounded in a sociohistorical ‘truth’.

707 It is difficult, if not entirely improper, to consider the Church’s control of Lourdes as a form of
708 touristic management but, like della Dora (2012), this research also points to the importance of
709 the social spaces that permit the telling and retelling of deeply meaningful experiences that, in
710 turn, become the trappings of meaningful visits for others. Those that manage the physical

711 space in order to protect its spiritual integrity may only be envisaging one dimension of the
712 liminoid effect of Lourdes. In spite of the ‘plastic figurines’ (see Swanson and Timothy, 2012),
713 liminoid experiences can and do occur within the seemingly, but not necessarily, contested
714 spaces and places that surround the spiritual epicenter of Lourdes. This poses a dilemma that
715 has been broached at other religious sites that also have touristic attraction (see for example
716 Ballantyne, Hughes and Bond, 2016; Hughes, Bond and Ballantyne, 2013).

717 Just as the extant literature has recognized the movement of ‘the pilgrim’ toward ‘the tourist’,
718 our research has also pointed out that ‘the tourist’ may also move toward ‘the pilgrim’.
719 Therefore, just as pilgrims and tourists are found to be sensitive to one another’s needs, so
720 should the providers of religious pilgrimages and tourism services recognize that their potential
721 roles and functions may overlap considerably. For example, this could manifest in the provision
722 of spaces where the telling and retelling of stories may be actively invited. A better
723 understanding of how pilgrims, in their many guises, navigate these spaces and places would
724 provide the spiritual guardians and tourist managers of Lourdes with valuable information
725 about how to best serve their needs. Information about the location and movement of those
726 embarking upon pilgrimages could enable local tourism service providers to maximize the
727 utilization of their resources in response to cyclic and sporadic demands.

728 While Bosangit, Hibbert and McCabe (2015) found that social media facilitates the capture and
729 sharing of meaningful experiences, our work proffers that messages that are imbued with a
730 deep sense of the sociohistorical authenticity of the site will resonate more deeply with its
731 audience. This comprises dimensions such as the ‘Echoes of Bernadette’ that we have
732 identified and the ‘mini-miracles’ that are also found to be important in constructing individual
733 meaning of pilgrimage (Bosangit, Higgins and McCabe, 2015). While the production of such
734 social media materials is largely undertaken by visiting individuals and therefore outside the
735 control of any organization, the providers of religious pilgrimages and tourism services could
736 utilize such elements of those materials that represent the individualistic experiences but are
737 rooted in the authentic history of the site in their own media and representations.

738 This study has some limitations. Firstly, the research is bound by the physical and metaphysical
739 limits of Lourdes. While this does permit the investigation of religious and secular visitors, the
740 conclusions are not necessarily generalizable to other pilgrimage or tourist destinations.
741 Secondly, the research methods employed, while providing rich data that are not readily
742 available through techniques that draw upon larger samples of the population, are inherently
743 capable of reinterpretation. Although every effort has been made to confirm the findings, and

744 they do in part resemble the findings of other studies (see for example Bosangit, Hibbert and
745 McCabe, 2015), the conclusions may be confirmed by examining more accounts of Lourdes
746 visitors.

747 Future research should acknowledge the insight that a post-postmodern perspective is capable
748 of bringing to our understanding of religious pilgrimage, and indeed, non-religious pilgrimage.
749 Similar work should be undertaken to explore the significance of ‘authenticity’ among religious
750 pilgrims’ construction of meaning at other significant sites and among targeted pilgrim
751 demographics. By extension, similar examinations could be made of more touristic
752 destinations. In particular, useful insight could be gained into consumption practices through
753 exploring the importance of ‘authenticity’ and through analysis of ‘big data’ and geolocation
754 data about pilgrim movement and consumption patterns.

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